

Educational Aspirations of coloured female learners in two Cape Flat Schools.

Dawn Carol Heskestad



M. Phil in Comparative and International Education
Institute for Educational Research

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

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ABSTRACT

Neighborhood environments that many schools in South Africa are situated in poses several challenges to educators and learners. The educational standards amongst South African schools and learners are a well-known legacy of the apartheid era government. These disparities have trickled down to manifest within different population sub-groups in a number of ways. Although schools are situated in similar geo-demographic areas, disparities do exist between these schools.

Based on a qualitative approach, this study explores the possible influence of school environments and neighborhood environments on the educational aspirations within one such sub-group – the coloured population. Comparisons of influences on the educational aspirations between two groups of coloured female learners in two Mitchell's Plain high schools are the focus of this study. Data collected through focus group discussions, observations and open-ended questionnaires provides the basis for the findings of this study. Through a purposive sampling strategy, a total of 20 grade 12 learners participated. The findings of the study were drawn from the emergence of observable patterns, which could possibly account for the differences amongst the two groups of participants and schools. The results of this study suggest that overall school culture appears to have a greater affect on students' agency, but that aspirations are somewhat similar for both groups of students. Furthermore, it appears that neighborhood environments have little influence despite the contrary findings of previous research.

Keywords: educational aspirations, apartheid legacy, coloured, school environment, neighborhood environment

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Dawn Heskestad

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List of Acronyms

DoE: Department of Education

GEEP: Gender Equality, Education and Poverty

LO: Life Orientation

NYP: National Youth Policy

UN: United Nations

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

1 INTRODUCTION

Cape Town is breathtaking to say the least. White sand beaches, blue sparkling oceans, and residential properties climbing the slopes of the majestic Table Mountain. It is a vibrant, hip and cosmopolitan city and rapidly becoming the hotspot of global tourism. The truth behind the entire splendor is that it is a city of stark contrasts and social fragmentation. Cape Town has a population that is deeply unequal and diverse; socially, racially, economically and spatially. The polarization of the population has much of the white population situated in the affluent mother-city¹, whereas the greater majority of the ‘non-white’ population lives in an expansive region called the ‘Cape Flats’². Economic, racial and spatial segregation exist within the Cape Flats – there are the more populous ‘coloured’³ communities, Mitchell’s Plain being one such community, and the less numerous, but more densely populated, African townships (Standing 2003). Standards of living vary within the Cape Flats but one can crudely say “that the Cape Flats is unacceptably impoverished” (Standing 2003:2).

The unequal political and economic distribution of power and resources during apartheid has left its scar on the neighborhoods of the ‘non-white’ populations. As remnants of the apartheid legacy, schools, communities and recreational areas are dilapidated, making the infrastructure of the Cape Flats unacceptably poor. Local state schools and public services in the Cape Flats suffer severe under-funding, poor quality and overcrowding (Sedibe 2011, Standing 2003). Resources, teaching materials, library facilities and computer labs are among the bundle of items that are lacking at many schools in South Africa, particularly in the coloured and black communities (UNICEF 2009). Furthermore, the physical conditions of school facilities and the safety of children at school is one concern. A report conducted by UNICEF (2009:96) on the matter of quality education states that much “still needs to be done before all South African children will be able to attend schools that meet the minimum

¹Because it was the site of the first European settlement in South Africa, Cape Town is known as the country’s “mother city”

²The Cape Flats is a low, sandy area extending inland from the peninsular Cape of Good Hope, Western Cape province, South Africa, and occupying most of the area between Table Bay and False Bay. Much of Cape Flats is now a truck-farming region and an area of large housing estates occupied mostly by South Africans of mixed race.

³Coloured, formerly Cape Coloured, a person of mixed European (“white”) and African (“black”) or Asian ancestry, as officially defined by the South African government from 1950 to 1991.

standards for safe, healthy and supportive learning environments. Standing (2003:1) describes one of the schools situated on the Cape Flats as follows, “the local school is surrounded by an electric fence to keep ‘gangsters’ out, and barbed wire and bullet-proof windows protect the few inhabited public buildings.” This quote highlights the issue of safety, but in addition the manner in which resources are prioritized is underlined. Furthermore, Human Rights Watch (2001) regards schools as violent places for girls, mainly in the form of sexual violence. Girls are often victims of crimes such as rape and physical abuse from male teachers and learners.

Due to the high-crime levels that characterize the region, investment from private sectors are scarce and state funding is just not sufficient to deal with the extensive agenda for improvements. Therefore, local state schools in the Cape Flats bear overcrowding, under-funding, poor facilities and often high student-teacher ratios, while being fenced in to keep ‘gangsters’ out, with girls being an especially vulnerable group (Standing 2003, UNICEF 2009).

1.1 Significance of the study

The starting point for this thesis was the realization of the social scientific assumptions of school environments and youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods, such as the Cape Flats, and especially female youth. Research and studies relating to youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods concludes that youth 1) living in deprived neighborhoods, 2) from single female-headed households, 3) from low socio- economic backgrounds have a) low aspirations, b) low attainment levels and c) low future expectations (Wilson 1987, Wilson & Wilson 1992, Stewart et al. 2007, Cabinet Office 2008, Crowder & Smith 2003, Quaglia & Cobb 1996, Kintrea 2009, Kintrea et al 2011, Cuthbert & Hatch 2009). The broad theme of this study is to explore the possible influence of the school environment and neighborhood environment on the educational aspirations of coloured girls. More specifically, this study focuses on an unrepresented and under-researched population in a historically complex and disadvantaged area. An impression from research and literature reviews reveals the manifestation of a knowledge gap when questions relating to the educational aspirations of coloured South African girls are raised. Studies dealing with educational aspirations and influences thereof in South Africa are often centered on white middle class or low-socio economic black populations (Watson et al. 2010).

1.2 Problem statement

The aim of this study is to explore possible influences on the educational aspirations of coloured female learners by examining the effects of the school and neighborhood environment.

The research questions are formulated as follow:

- 1) How does the school environment influence educational aspirations of coloured female learners?
- 2) How does living in one of the Cape Flats disadvantaged neighborhoods, Mitchell's Plain, influence educational aspirations of coloured female learners?

1.3 Literature Review

This section sets out to create platform for the reasoning behind and relevance of the study. I start off broadly, on a policy level from an international perspective and then narrowing in to a national level. Firstly, a short overview of the position of educational aspirations of youth in international and national policy documents will be given. Thereafter, a review of research literature pertaining to the educational aspirations of young people will be given with a focus on three main patterns: 1) individual-level factors, 2) family-level attributes and 3) contextual-level factors/neighborhood effects.

Educational aspirations signify a personal, intrinsic value relating to one's dreams, ambitions, goals, wishes or desires. The educational dimension has to do with the level of schooling one aspires or wishes to attain (Brookover et al. 1967). Although educational aspirations and occupational goals of young people denote a personal value, "it is rare to find an educational mission statement today absent of some reference to student aspirations" (Quaglia & Cobb 1996:127). National and international bodies and policies have taken much interest in the educational aspirations of young people and it has now become a universal priority (Kintrea 2009, Kintrea et al. 2011, Cabinet Office 2008, Quaglia & Cobb 1996).

So, what is the aim and interest of national and international agencies and policies to raise the educational aspirations of youth? Interest from national governments, regional and international organizations on young people's aspirations are closely related to policy agendas on student social mobility, increase of knowledge production, increase of skills and employment as the basis for a country's socio-economic and human development. At the core

of socio-economic and human development lies education as a central driving force towards growth and development both on an individual, national and international level (UNESCO 2007, Lagrée 2002, Kintrea 2009, Kintrea et al. 2011).

On an international policy level, raising youth aspirations and increasing youth enrollment in higher education has also received attention from various organizations such as the World Bank, the European Union and UNESCO. However, these matters do not only relate to a country's growth in human and economic capital, but also to the importance of youth participation and contribution in a globalized and competitive world (World Bank 2009, UNESCO 2007, Lagrée 2002). Youth aspirations are formed "by questioning, expressing their views and having their opinions taken seriously that [is when] young people develop skills, build competencies, acquire confidence and form aspirations" (UNESCO 2007:11). Article 28 1(d) in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989) states that governments should "make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children." Drawing from international policies, governments have the responsibility firstly to a) aid in the formation of youth aspirations, and b) make information available to reach their aspirations.

On a national policy level, South Africa's National Youth Policy (NYP) 2009-2014 (The Presidency 2008) includes youth aspirations as one of the important themes. This policy clearly links the importance of education to the increase of youth social mobility, employability and socio-economic development. The importance of raising youth aspirations and their participation and contribution to the country's human and economic development is a central theme in the NYP. National interest for the development of youth mobility and increase of youth aspirations is two-dimensional. The first dimension is personal development of youth in terms of economic and social development. The second dimension relates to the increase and development of the country's human and economic capital. Furthermore, three non-discriminating rights are ascribed to youth in the NYP: 1) attain an educational level commensurate with their aspirations 2) career guidance and 3) access employment opportunities equal to their abilities (The Presidency 2008).

Community empowerment is also a central theme in international and national policies. Agendas within such documents relate to the aim of giving people "the power and capabilities to change their own lives, improve their own communities and influence their own destinies" (UNESCO 2007:21). National neighborhood renewal and community empowerment policies

in South Africa have recognized the realities and barriers in disadvantaged communities. Challenges faced within such communities range from basic infrastructure needs such as water, sewage and housing. Other issues pertaining to the possible influence of disadvantaged communities on youth educational aspirations include that of crime and gangsterism, drug use, school dropout, early pregnancy/parenthood and high unemployment rates (City of Cape Town 2011).

Researchers have also approached the topic of educational aspirations from numerous angles and within different academic fields. From the abundance of research literature, I have sketched three main patterns or trends within research relating to educational aspirations of young people.

Firstly, research with a focus on the influence of individual-level factors on the formation of educational aspirations includes variables such as social class, ethnicity, gender, academic record and subject choice (MacBrayne 1987, Kintrea 2009, Kintrea et al. 2011, Fuller 2011, Stewart et al. 2007, Crowder & South 2003, Cabinet Office 2008). Findings from studies with a focus on individual – level attributes mainly, suggest that educational aspirations vary by gender, ethnicity and social class. Results from these investigations are far from uniform. Earlier studies suggests that the aspirations of young males are higher than females (Herzog 1982, Majoribanks 1984, Wilson & Wilson 1992), and that white-middle class youth have a higher – level of aspirations than black-lower class youth (Watson et al 2010). More recent studies, on the other hand, suggest that girls have higher aspirations than boys and that white – middle class youth have lower level of aspirations than black-lower class youth (Cabinet Office 2008).

The second pattern is research with a focus on the influence of family- level attributes includes variables such as the socio-economic status, educational level of parents and home dynamics such as single parent headed households. Findings from these studies suggest that parents and family attributes seem to influence student aspirations (Cabinet Office 2008, Wilson & Wilson 1992, Crowder & Smith 2003). The higher the level of education a parent possess, the more likely it is that their child would have a high level of aspiration (Wilson & Wilson 1992), the more financial resources a family has, the more likely it is that their child will have high aspirations and that youth from single parent headed households are less likely to have high aspirations (Wilson & Wilson 1992, Crowder & Smith 2003).

What we can learn from research with focus on individual - and family - level attributes is that researchers agree that these attributes do exert some influence on the educational aspirations of young people (Crowder & Smith 2003). However, young people and their parents live in certain communities and within these communities are various institutions such as schools (Cabinet Office 2008). This calls for a contextualization of young people's educational aspirations within their communities, which brings me to the third trend within research.

Research with focus on the influence of contextual level factors or neighborhood effects on the formation of educational aspirations includes variables such as poverty and employment levels, crime rates, housing structures and population density, racial composition, gender and age variations (Crowder & South 2003). Research studies with a focus on the influence of neighborhood effects on young people's aspirations usually makes comparisons between rural and urban or rich and poor communities (MacBrayne 1987). Results from these studies suggest that young people from deprived communities and socially disadvantaged backgrounds "are less likely to develop ambitions [and] achievable aspirations" (Cabinet office 2008), that the effects of disadvantaged neighborhoods lower student's future expectations as well as their educational accomplishments (Wilson 1987). Further, that young people from deprived neighborhoods tend to have lower educational aspirations and expectations (Cabinet Office 2008, Wilson 1987).

While much can be learned from previous research studies on the topic of educational aspirations with a focus on individual and family level factors, research also suggests that the effects of deprived neighborhoods have a negative effect on educational outcomes and aspirations (Wilson 1987, Wilson & Wilson 1992, Stewart et al. 2007). There appears to be some kind of knowledge gap however when questions relating to the educational aspirations of coloured South African girls are raised. Studies dealing with educational aspirations and influences thereof in South Africa are often centered on white middle class or low-socio economic black populations, as noted earlier (Watson et al. 2010).

1.4 Limitations of the Study

Time limitation was the main issue of this study. The fieldwork was conducted between September-October 2011. During this period, grade 12 learners and teachers were in

preparation for the national matric examinations. This meant that the availability of the learners was not as I hoped it would be and as a result this gave me less time with the participants. In addition, a great deal of scheduling various meeting times as to accommodate the learners' schedules had to be done. Despite these limitations, I do believe that I was able to collect useful and relevant data.

1.5 Organization of the thesis

This thesis is structured into six chapters. Chapter one has shed light on the significance of the study. The second part of the chapter consisted of the literature review by placing the topic of the study in a broader perspective, from an international to a national level of discourse. Literature trends pertaining to the topic of this thesis are given and an attempt to identify existing knowledge gaps. Here focus was placed on patterns and trends from previous research pertaining to the influence on and formation of educational aspirations. These patterns included individual-level factors, family-level attributes and contextual level factors or neighborhood effects that were presented. This laid the ground for the problem statement, research area and the research focus of the study.

In Chapter two, principle concepts that are used in the study will be defined. An attempt to provide the reader with a historical and cultural contextual portrayal of the inequalities and imbalances amongst schools, society and gender in South Africa will follow. This will set the stage from a historical perspective. In the second part of the chapter, a cultural and statistical background of the research site will be exposed in order to give the reader insight and a better understanding of the realities of the participants in the study.

The analytical framework for this study is a combination of theory and literature review. Chapter three introduces the theory of Neighborhood Organization and Culture by Elliott et al. 2006. The main objective of this chapter is to provide an overview of the various influences of neighborhood and school environment as influences on educational aspirations.

The fourth chapter presents the methodological aspects and choices employed in this study. Emphasizing the qualitative research inquiry that sets the basis for the fieldwork conducted in South Africa will be defined. The research process which includes the choice of research design, sampling strategy, data collection methods and ethical measures which fall under this chapter will be accounted for.

The data presentation and data analysis will follow in chapter five. The main findings of the research are presented, coinciding with the specific objectives of the study.

Chapter six serves as the final discussion of the thesis, combining the literature review and theoretical framework presented in chapter one and three together with the main findings presented in chapter five. In summing up this chapter I attempt to answer the principal research questions asked in this study.

2 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND: SETTING THE STAGE

2.1 Introduction

There are multiple influences on young people's aspirations. This study contains three central concepts. That is aspirations, school environment and the neighborhood environment. This section will firstly present the definitions of the principle concepts. Subsequently, a historical perspective relating to educational politics and the place of young woman in South Africa will be given. Thereafter, a detailed characteristic map of the research location will be presented in order to set the stage for the research study.

2.2 Multiple influences on Aspirations

I have chosen a simplified model (Cabinet Office 2008:12), which is presented below, to illustrate the various influences on aspirations. Young people's attitudes, values and aspirations are influenced by different people, institutions and environments that are present in their lives.

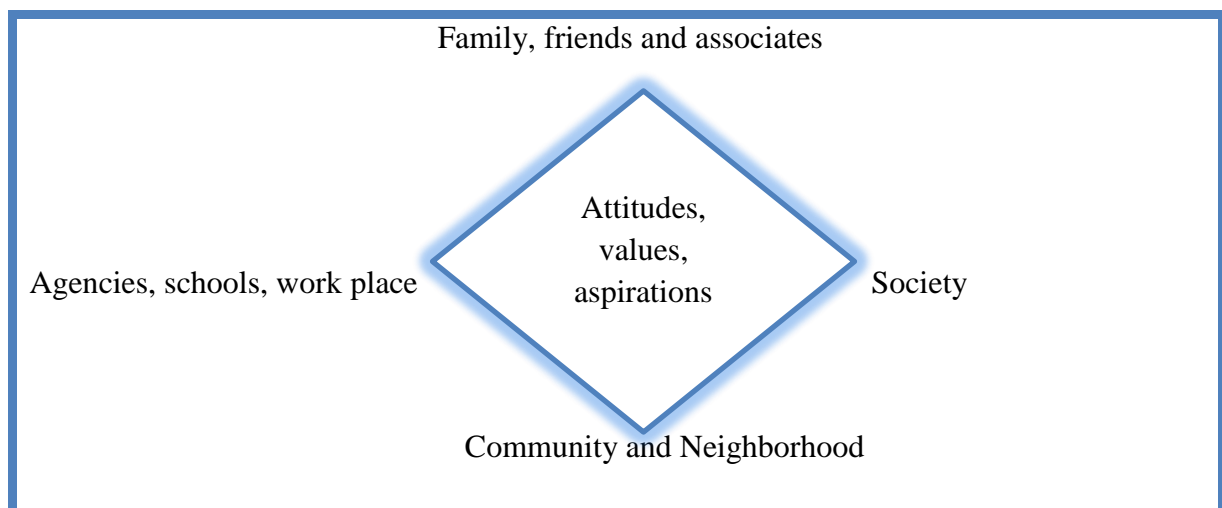


Figure 2.1: Multiple influences on aspirations

The model above illustrates the various influences on the aspirations of young people. The socio-economic circumstance of the family, the expectation and attitudes of parents plays an

important influential role in the formation of aspirations of young people. Schools are another central institution in young people's lives. Teacher expectations and school values and beliefs may influence student's values, attitudes and aspirations. The wider societal values and media may influence attitudes and values such as gender and racial stereotype, and the perception of what is acceptable behavior and attitudes. The social networks and ties within neighborhoods and communities that people live in may influence the attitudes, values and aspirations of young people (Cabinet Office 2008).

2.2.1 Aspirations

“Aspirations can be defined as a student's ability to identify and set goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to work toward those goals” (Quaglia & Cobb 1996:130).

The above quote can be viewed as a deconstruction of the concept aspirations into two major cornerstones by authors Quaglia and Cobb (1996). One dimension of the concept is inspiration and the other ambitions, which I find to be a relevant conceptualization of the concept for this study. The authors further state that the concept entails an individual's activity that relates both to the present (inspirations) and the future (ambitions). In other words, the ability to recognize and establish one's goals for the future while being involved and motivated in the present in order to succeed and reach these goals. Furthermore, aspirations, that is the inspirations and ambitions dimensions, takes place within specific contexts. And are therefore a matter of changing influences and value judgments.

2.2.2 School Environment

According to Quaglia and Cobb (1996:130), “when perceiving student aspirations, one has to take into account the interaction of the students in their environment”. The school environment can be seen as one of the major environments that students function in. The school environment can be described as consisting of school culture and school climate. According to Tableman (2004:1), school climate can be characterized as “the organization at the school building and classroom level. It refers to the “feel” of a school and can vary from school to school within the same district.” Whereas school culture, “reflects the shared ideas – assumptions, values and beliefs – that give an organization its identity and standard for expected behaviors”. Drawing on elements from school culture and school climate, school

environment in this study is broadly described in terms of two elements, that is: 1) the learning environment in relation to career advice, and 2) the availability of information.

2.2.3 Neighborhood Environment

In addition to the school environment, one cannot overlook the possible influence of the neighborhood or the place in which students and schools function, on student aspirations. A distinction or classification of the term neighborhood as a context is needed for this study. I find the distinction made by Wellman and Leighton (1979) useful. The authors differentiate between the physical neighborhood and the broader concepts of the community and social networks. While, neighborhood refers to a physical location or place, community is a broader concept that includes patterns of social relationships and social networks. Elliott et al. (2006) further explains that the social networks of individuals may arise in the context of the neighborhood, or in other contexts such as schools, or in formal and informal social institutions.

The Cabinet Office (2008) makes a similar distinction as Wellman and Leighton (1979). Place/Neighborhood is characterized by the following criteria: physical environment, housing and planning, transport and infrastructure, institutions and public spaces, places to work, places to learn, places for play and leisure. Communities include features such as: social connections, age and generation, race and culture, interests, history and traditions, dynamic and evolving, virtual and technological.

This study focuses on a combination of neighborhood - community definition of place or context. Certain features of each concept will be drawn on to emphasize the possible influence it has on educational aspirations. One has to recognize the influence of neighborhood structural characteristics as well as the social dimensions within neighborhoods, on the influence of educational aspirations.

2.3 Educational Politics

The relevance of educational aspirations of coloured female learners in contemporary discourse does not only relate to the aims of national and international bodies. This also relates back to the inequalities and imbalances amongst schools, society and gender that was shaped by the apartheid era.

South Africa's political transition in 1994 towards a constitutional democracy was only the starting point towards South Africa's development agenda. Structural inequities are the remains of the apartheid legacy in all sectors of South Africa. Challenges and priorities range from the health and labour, economic and public service sectors (World Bank 2009). Since the 1994 democratic elections, educational reforms have been a key part in reconstruction and development programs in the country. The apartheid education system implemented the Bantu Education Act, Act No. 47 of 1953⁴. The new democratic government was in need of educational transformation and unraveling of the apartheid system. As to accomplish a more equitable educational system, focus was placed on the alleviation of segregation, race, gender and class discriminations. Strategies for an equitable, non-discriminating education system became the aim of the new government (DoE 2001).

While various attempts have been made by the post-apartheid government to restore balance within society, inequalities amongst South Africa's racial groups subsist. Inequality in income, access and opportunity in education and equity remains characteristic of the democratic South African society. Changes have occurred in the education system, but "class inequalities remain in many areas (and) dramatic differences between schools in terms of numbers and level of training of teachers, quality of classrooms and equipment" persists (Unterhalter et al. 2004:589). Financial and human resources, student attainment and opportunity limitations are only some of the issues that remain among South African schools, not only among formerly white schools, but also between schools located in very similar areas (Unterhalter et al. 2004, Sedibe 2011).

2.4 Young coloured women of South Africa

Young women in South Africa are a vulnerable group (The Presidency 2008). The country has a constitutional democracy, but historical gender stereotypes remain rooted in the society. The intimidating nature of the apartheid regime utilized state institutions as apparatuses to reinforce white class power, segregation and gender inequalities. Educational institutions were utilized as one apparatus. Gendered identities were often a feature associated with race and class positions. The shaping of gender identities and gender roles during apartheid was

⁴The government also established direct control over the education of blacks. The Bantu Education Act (1953) took black schools away from the missions, and more state-run schools—especially at the elementary level—were created to meet the expanding economy's increasing demand for semiskilled black laborers (Frankental & Sichone 2005).

very much shaped by the pattern of male employment, which usually drew men away from the home (Unterhalter et al. 2004). This is because “domestic obligation makes many women feel unable to participate in their own educational advancement. And girls often also adopt domestic roles at early ages, shaping their impressions of women’s roles in society and interfering with their involvement in education” (Kubow & Fossum 2007:135).

Women are still faced with challenges and difficulties in a traditional male dominated society. Prevailing gender imbalances on the issues of employment, educational and occupational opportunities still exists. Notwithstanding the fact that women are legally considered equal citizens and economic participants but the majority of South African women remain trapped within inferior educational opportunities, constrained by customary law and practices, and confined to limited economic roles (Holmarsdottir et al. 2012). Factors impeding on women’s opportunities varies from challenges and inequalities within home, school and society such as gender-based violence and abuse, HIV and AIDS, teenage pregnancy, poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, rape and gangsterism, which are common characteristics of coloured communities in South Africa. Mitchell’s Plain is such a community (The Presidency 2008, Cole & Narsoo 2007).

2.5 Background of Research location

As to understand the daily living situations and realities of the participants in this study, a detailed characteristic description of Mitchell’s Plain will be given in order to underline the backgrounds of the participants. The research location is described, which will be followed by a more detailed portrayal of the school profiles later in chapter five. The formation history of Mitchell’s Plain, the population composition and the socio-economic information will be provided below.

2.5.1 Mitchell’s Plain

Mitchell’s Plain stems from the social engineering of the apartheid government. The Group Areas Act, Act no 41 of 1950 and the Lands Acts stipulated that urban areas were to be divided into segregated racial zones or group areas according to race. In addition to residential segregation, schools, welfare and health services were also segregated and inferior for blacks, Indians and coloureds. District Six in the city of Cape Town was then home to a mixed

community, but due to the Group Areas Act they were forcefully removed and their homes bulldozed. As a solution to alleviate housing shortages, the apartheid government commenced with the spatial construction of Mitchell's Plain. The commencement of Mitchell's Plain began in the 1970's which planned to initially house 250 000 coloured people and it is located 30 kilometers from the city center of Cape Town (Cole & Narsoo 2007, City of Cape Town 2011, Van Den Berghe 1965, Frankental & Sichone 2005).

2.5.2 The People

The racial population composition of Mitchell's Plain is somewhat homogeneous. It is not solely a coloured community, but the majority of its population is coloured. Drawing on the most recent available published statistics from 2001, the total population of Mitchell's Plain was recorded at 283,196. A population profile is presented below which includes the male/female distribution by race.

	Racial group. Pop.	Male pop.	Female pop.
Coloured	253,746 (89,6 %)	122,260 (43,1 %)	131,485 (46,4 %)
Black African	26,712 (9,4 %)	12,692 (4,4 %)	14,021 (4,9 %)
Other: Indian/Asian/White	2739 (0,9 %)	1374 (0,4 %)	1365 (0,4 %)

Table 2.5: Mitchell's Plain: Male/Female distribution by race, 2001.

Source: Stats SA Compiled by Strategic Development Information and GIS from 2001 Census data supplied by Statistics South Africa

The coloured population is recorded at 89, 6 percent, whereof 43, 1 percent is male and 46, 4 percent is female and, the black population account for 9, 4 percent. Mitchell's Plain is further divided into nine sub-areas (Statistic SA, Census 2001).

2.5.3 Socio-economic Characteristics

Mitchell's Plain is one of the areas in the Cape Flats with the "largest population of any district and has the highest population density. It is characterized by the lowest standard of

living and has the highest unemployment in the city” (City of Cape Town 2011:30). Standing (2003:1) describes the labour and wage market as “uncertain, occasional and insufficient” which makes the labour market highly flexible and employment insecure. This trend in employment contributes to the high level of unemployment rates which is recorded at 46 percent. Mitchell’s Plain is also known for the backlog of formal housing and for the backyard “wendy”/ shack. This causes high levels of poor and overcrowding housing with one third of households living in either one or two rooms.

Crime and gang activity is infamous for this part of the Cape Flats. “The district has one of the worst “social fabric” crime rates of all districts. In 2005/2006, it had by far the largest percentage (44.6%) of reported murders and reported rapes (33.9%) in the city. It also has the second highest incidence of drug-related crime (19.7%) in the city” (City of Cape Town 2011:28). Gangsters continue to threaten, intimidate and extract “tribute” from local businesses. These gangs are also responsible for the drug trade in the area, as most gang leaders are drug lords. “The high level of violence on the Cape Flats has, understandably, made the area menacing to outsiders. Many zones are considered ‘out of bounds’ for non-residents due to street gangs and the risk of violent assault or high jacking” (Standing 2003:2).

Mitchell’s Plain has a large youth population of 41, 1 percent. Youth living in Mitchell’s Plain are exposed to a great deal of drugs, gang violence and criminal activities. In addition, teen pregnancy and HIV/AIDS are some of the issues youth face.

The extract below is taken from the Cape Argus in Standing (2003:1) who reported on two local academic studies into children’s experience of violence on the Cape Flats:

Ninety-seven per cent [of children surveyed] reported hearing gunshots, nearly half had seen the dead body of a stranger and nearly as many the dead body of a relative, or somebody they knew, who had died from unnatural causes. Many had seen people being shot or stabbed, and more than a third of them had seen somebody shot or stabbed in their own homes. Several had themselves been shot, stabbed or rapped, or been threatened with a gun or a knife.

The above extract sums up the realities that youth in South Africa are facing on a daily basis. Their environments are filled with violent crime activities that not only put their lives in jeopardy but also affect them on a psychological level.

2.6 Summary

The first section of this chapter set out to define the principle concepts in the study. Thereafter, a brief introduction in a historical perspective of education and girls in South Africa was given. I then attempted to give the reader a lens in viewing the research location but more importantly, an attempt to illustrate the neighborhood of the participants in this study. The history behind the establishment of Mitchell's Plain and the coloured people who live there has been accounted for. The socio-economic dimensions of Mitchell's Plain have been described. In conclusion, the Cape Flats, whereof Mitchell's Plain is the focus, is thus home to a vast number of coloured people and families who precariously exist outside the formal economy, within a structurally disadvantaged environment with high levels of gang activity. In many ways, Mitchell's Plain is what many social scientists would refer to as being 'socially excluded' both on an economic and social level (Standing 2003).

3 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present the analytical framework. There is a need to view the multiple dimensions of the influences on and the formation of aspirations as a dynamic process and within a specific context. The different social interactions and experiences of young people may aid in the promotion or restriction of the goals and aspirations they set for themselves. Aspirations are formed and influenced by formal institutions such as schools and within the neighborhoods where young people live. As the starting point for the analytical framework for this study, I will draw on Elliott et al's. (2006) theory of *Neighborhood Organization and Culture* and my literature review presented in chapter 1. The model below is a modified version of Elliott et al's (2006) model of Neighborhood and School Influences on Educational Aspiration.

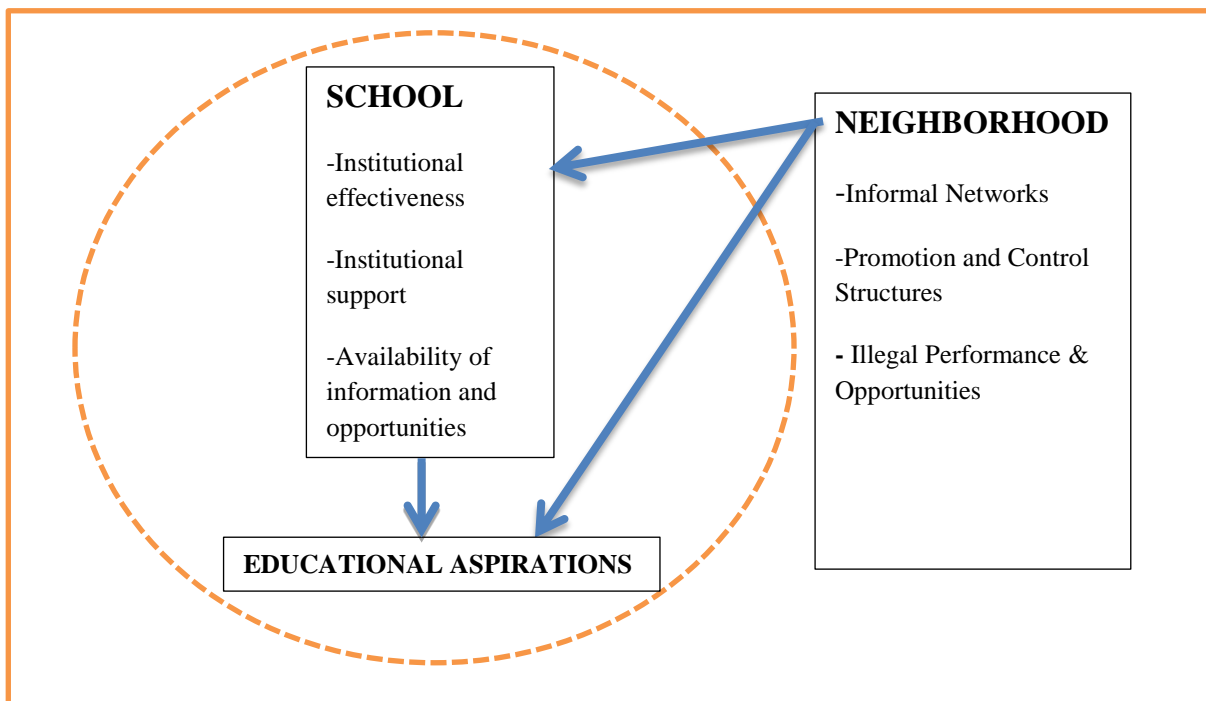


Figure 3.1: Model of Neighborhood and School Influences on Educational Aspiration

3.2 Theory of Neighborhood Organization and Culture

In the theory of neighborhood organization and culture, the *culture* of a neighborhood refers to the social networks, norms and values, shared understanding and common activities among neighbors. *Organization* refers to the social organization of the neighborhood, how well do the members of the neighborhood interact and stick together. According to the theory of neighborhood organization and culture, the disadvantaged and physical deterioration of a neighborhood influences youth development and outcomes, but it is mainly through the patterns of social interactions among residents that live in the neighborhood. Because of the social interactions among residents, a certain kind of social organization and culture will develop over time. Elliott et al. (2006) advocate that the organization and culture of neighborhoods regulate in the successful or unsuccessful development and outcomes of youth. Here, educational aspirations are such an outcome.

On the subject of the neighborhood demographic composition, the authors state that the physical characteristics of a neighborhood have relatively weak influence on youth development and outcomes. Furthermore, the effects of the physical characteristics of the neighborhood are largely indirect, and almost entirely mediated by the emergent social organization and culture of the neighborhood. Therefore, the quality of the neighborhood as a social context for youth development is determined by the culture and organization of the neighborhood rather than by the level of poverty and disadvantage (Elliott et al. 2006:277-278).

In *Good Kids from Bad Neighborhoods: Successful Development in Social Context*, Elliott et al. (2006) hypothesizes that:

some neighborhoods are better than others in supporting the lives and maximizing the potential of those who live there, more specifically, that advantaged/low-poverty neighborhoods were better than disadvantaged/high-poverty neighborhoods at promoting a positive course of youth development and protecting youth from health compromising , dysfunctional behavior (Elliott et al. 2006:275).

The above quote suggests that youth who live in disadvantaged/high-poverty neighborhoods are subject to failure, dysfunctional behavior and negative development. Although, weak and indirect the influence of neighborhood disadvantage is it still has some degree of influence on youth development and outcomes. Furthermore, the degree of influence of disadvantaged and

deterioration of neighborhoods are facilitated by the social dimensions within a neighborhood. In other words, within a neighborhood there exist certain kinds of informal networks which are shaped by the residents of that neighborhood. These informal networks can support and promote successful youth development and outcomes, but when these networks are weak it can restrict positive youth development and outcomes. The degree or presence of these informal networks can act as control structures either by promoting or restricting dysfunctional lifestyles and behavior that may interfere with successful youth development.

A neighborhood with a strong organization and culture, informal networks of residents aids in the promotion of a positive course of youth development and discourage dysfunctional behavior (Ellito et al. 2006, Wilson & Wilson 1992, Quaglia & Cobb 1996). Neighborhoods with the ability to resist the introduction of drugs, crime and other negative influences in the neighborhood, are perceived as organized and good neighborhoods. This type of organization/culture of a neighborhood can protect youth from the potential negative effects of disadvantage and deterioration. Stereotypically, disadvantaged neighborhoods are perceived as having a weak and ineffective organization and unsupportive culture, as the demographic conditions tends to challenge and restrict social interaction between residents (Elliot et al. 2006).Raffo (2011), looks at a combination of the structural, cultural and ethnographic characteristics of disadvantaged neighborhoods and how these characteristics influence the educational identity and agency of youth. The author also emphasizes the importance of looking at neighborhood characteristics and the influence it has on youth in relation to their attitude towards education.

3.3 Neighborhood: Informal Promotion and Control Structures

One of the dimensions within the neighborhood is that of informal promotion and social control. Neighborhood Organization and Culture theory states that the principal organizational structure within neighborhoods is the dynamic social relationships that arise or fail to arise. These social interactions occur between residents and assist and regulate social development in the neighborhood. In addition, these informal social networks function to support or control youth developmental processes and outcomes in the neighborhood.

3.3.1 Informal Networks as promotion and Social Control

Informal networks refer to mutual networks between individuals and families within the neighborhood. A requisite within such a network is that it gives support but that the support should then be returned to others in the network. Social control is established through the interrelated system of friendship and family networks. The benefit or purpose of informal networks within neighborhoods is that it “provide the most direct surveillance of neighborhood activities, supervision of children and youth, intervention into questionable activities that might be occurring in the neighborhood, and an awareness of who belongs in the neighborhood and who are strangers” (Elliott 2006:110).

Hunter (1985 cited in Elliott et al. 2006:111) has identified three levels of specific control mechanisms of neighborhood social networks. These include:

- 1) Private networks involve informal, intimate, face-to-face, interpersonal networks where control is achieved through criticism, shaming, ridicule, avoidance, and possible rejection from the group.
- 2) Parochial networks consists of interlocking friendship networks with the broader, less intimate networks of persons in local institutions such as teachers, members of one’s church, casual friends and acquaintances at work, here control is achieved through the allocation or threatened withdrawal of services and supports of mutual esteem or status.
- 3) Public networks refer to the neighborhood’s linkages to the city and county government agencies in the larger community. Through these broader institutional relationships, residents can secure public resources and services from agencies located outside the neighborhood.

Strong controls on behavior within neighborhoods are reinforced when informal social networks overlap and are interrelated. In other words, the presence of integrated child-adult networks, meaning that parents know their children’s friends, their friends’ parents and children know their parents friends and work colleagues. However, the absence or a weak presence of these informal structures may provide no or ineffective controls on behavior in neighborhoods. In private and parochial networks, control is achieved through potential group punishments but “the group also has mechanisms for rewarding approved behaviors, beliefs, skills, and aspirations” (Elliott et al. 2006:112). Informal social networks and social control may promote or constrain the successful development of youth in the neighborhood. Positive youth developmental outcomes can be achieved when informal social networks are able to provide support and guidance for practical steps in how to achieve goals. Goals are restricted

when members in informal networks have little knowledge about what is required to achieve certain goals and when there are no positive role models available in the neighborhood.

3.4 Neighborhood: Illegal Performance and Opportunities

Another dimension within a neighborhood is that of illegal performance and opportunities. This dimension refers to the illegal activities and opportunities that youth are exposed to within their neighborhood. According to the theory of neighborhood organization and culture, dysfunctional lifestyles and crime activity are usually associated with disadvantaged neighborhoods (Elliott et al. 2006). These kinds of features emerge when the neighborhood is structurally and culturally disorganized. That is, when effective control and resistance mechanisms fail due to the lack of the residences collective power to organize this within the neighborhood. Once control and resistance mechanisms lack “small-time theft rings, gambling, prostitution, drug distribution networks and other illegal enterprises (are drawn) into these neighborhoods” (Elliott et al. 2006:116). Collective action to control undesired behavior is impossible when there are no effective informal networks, low levels of common norms and values, limited resources and a weak connection to the broader community (Raffo 2011).

3.4.1 Disadvantaged, Organized Neighborhoods

According to Elliott et al. (2006), disadvantaged, organized neighborhoods have effective informal networks and are often based on illegal economic activities. Within this kind of organized high-crime neighborhood, the establishment of private, parochial and public networks involves various members such as family, friends, police enforcement, illicit business operations, etc. “These criminal networks perform the same support and socialization functions as more conventional networks; but they have a different normative and value orientation – a different culture” (Elliott et al. 2006:118). Youth are exposed to criminal learning and opportunity structures such as criminal values, role models and opportunities to be involved in criminal activities. A certain degree of control and order exists within organized high-crime neighborhoods and this provides youth with different types of social and economic opportunities. Criminal and illegal activities are molded and rewarded. Opportunities for “legitimate work are limited in disadvantaged neighborhoods, participation

in the illicit economy is often more lucrative and immediate, requiring less effort and fewer institutional hurdles” (Elliott et al. 2006:119). This kind of organized high-crime neighborhood promotes a certain kind of unconventional lifestyle and culture which may restrict positive youth development and outcomes.

Research studies with a focus on community/neighborhood level attributes include neighborhood characteristics such as poverty, crime rates, population density, and racial composition and employment levels. According to these studies, the characteristics of the neighborhood influences educational aspirations of youth (Cabinet Office 2008, Crowder & South 2003, MacBrayne 1987, Wilson 1987, Wilson & Wilson 1992). Elliott et al. (2006) on the other hand look closer at the social networks and social relationships within such communities, and how these social dimensions of neighborhoods may influence the development and aspirations of youth. From research studies and the theory of neighborhood organization and culture, the physical characteristics and the internal processes or social relationships within neighborhoods may influence the aspirations and development of youth.

3.5 Schools: Institutional Effectiveness and Support

The second social context for youth development is the school. Elliott et al. (2006), view the school as a source of opportunity for success and as a place in which there are potential risks from violent or aggressive behavior of other students and sometimes teachers, and from poor quality education (Quaglia & Cobb 1996). Further, it is assumed that “both school climate and school violence tend to be worse in disadvantaged, socially disorganized neighborhoods” (Elliott et al. 2006:209).

The influence of the neighborhood on the school environment consists of the proximate neighborhood that surrounds the school and from where students come from, and the family background characteristics of the students. In other words, the socio-economic make-up of the students and the nature (organization and culture) of the surrounding area of the school account as influences on the school environment. The school environment then influences developmental outcomes such as educational attainment, acquisition of skills, pro-social behavior and aspirations.

It appears, then, that school climate and school violence may be attributable to a common set of causes and may influence a broad range of youth development

outcomes, including not only competence and aspirations but also the extent of prosocial behavior and problem behavior, both during the school years (Elliott et al. 2006:215).

Research studies with a focus on family-level attributes include variables such as the socio-economic status, parents' educational levels and home dynamics. According to these studies, the characteristics of family-level attributes influence the aspirations of youth (Cabinet Office 2008, Wilson & Wilson 1992, Wilson 1987, Crowder & Smith 2003). Elliott et al. (2006), however, examine how the family background characteristics of the students influence the school environment. The school environment then influences the aspirations and development of youth.

Schools are rooted in neighborhoods and are one of the central social institutions in neighborhoods. Institutional effectiveness refers to the quality of institutional presence of formal institutions in a neighborhood. The quality and the capacity of formal institutions are directly affected by the nature of the neighborhood. In other words, neighborhoods with high quality deliverance of basic services such as schools, police protection, health care services, recreational facilities etc. are characterized as a good neighborhood with high institutional effectiveness and presence of formal institutions. While, weak, ineffective institutional presence is characterized by a lack of political influence, residential instability of families and limited economic resources that are to be found in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Because residents in disadvantaged neighborhoods have a low spending power, local businesses often seek more lucrative markets (The Presidency 2008, Standing 2003). This leaves the neighborhood economy to be insufficient to maintain the quality or even just the daily running of its formal institutions. Features that represent bad neighborhoods include that of low quality deliverance and presence of public services and formal institutions (Elliott et al. 2006).

The theory of neighborhood organization and culture assumes that schools located in or serving disadvantaged neighborhoods delivers low quality educational services (Elliott et al. 2006). Schools within these neighborhoods have limited educational resources, which is explained by the low tax revenues of commercial markets and residential housing that is a common feature within disadvantaged neighborhoods. Therefore, schools often have to function on a "lower per-pupil budget, lack up-to-date textbooks and teaching materials, an employ less qualified and competent teachers than more affluent neighborhood schools" (Elliott et al. 2006:107). The nature of many schools in South Africa's disadvantaged

neighborhood are facing many of these same challenges relating to human and physical resources (Unterhalter et al. 2004, UNICEF 2009, Standing 2003). In addition, recreational, after-school programs and supportive educational services are much less present in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Due to the low educational resources and quality of schools in or serving disadvantaged neighborhoods, the assumed results for students are that of low achievement rates, low aspirations and higher dropout rates.

The degree of institutional presence within a neighborhood can either greatly restrict opportunities for legitimate work, advanced education and training or it can support or encourage it. Institutional presence of schools is related to the availability of information and opportunities about education and work (Raffo 2011). A strong educational and work presence within a neighborhood indicates that information about the opportunities and how to access information is readily available. A weak educational and work presence indicates that there is limited information about how to access opportunities. Social relationships between youth and adults in or outside their neighborhoods may increase the availability of information and opportunities to youth (Raffo 2011). Youth who have limited exposure to adults or meaningful contacts with adults in formal institutions may have restricted or no knowledge about education and work opportunities available to them, hence restricting positive youth developmental outcomes (Quaglia & Cobb 1996, Wilson & Wilson 1992, Elliott et al. 2006).

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will firstly describe the research strategy used in the study. Before elaborating on my research process, I will first give a short description of my role as a researcher. I find this to be important because “the perspective that the researcher brings to qualitative inquiry is part of the context for the findings” (Patton 2002:64). Thereafter, the choice and justification of my research design, sampling strategy, data collection methods, data analysis process, criteria in qualitative research and lastly, the ethical issues will be explained.

4.1.1 A Qualitative Research Strategy

Qualitative research is holistic, in the sense that it attempts to provide a contextual understanding of the complex interrelationships of causes and consequences that affect human behaviour. In doing so it seeks to avoid both the deliberate manipulation of variables (characteristic of the experimental tradition of educational research) and the study of attitudes or indicators as variables isolated from the wider totality (characteristic of the survey tradition). A further consequence of this holistic emphasis is that qualitative research tends to incorporate a wide variety of specific research techniques, even within one research project (Vulliamy, Lewin and Stephens 1990 cited in Brock-Utne 1996:610).

A research strategy can be defined as a general positioning to the conduct of social research. Quantitative and qualitative are two approaches within social research. These research strategies differ in three specific ways that is in the way we view knowledge (epistemology), the way we view reality (ontology) and in the way we view the connection between theory and research (deductive vs. inductive). Social reality is important because it is meaningful to people and hence understanding human behavior is meaningful. Within social science, one can differentiate between positivism and interpretivism, where positivism aims at explaining human behavior and interpretivism aims at understanding human behavior (Bryman 2008, Schwandt 2000).

The philosophical underpinning for this study is positioned on an interpretivist epistemological paradigm, because I was interested in the depth rather than the breadth of the participant's views and experiences of their social world. Emphasis was placed on

understanding the social world of the participants by listening to their stories and not through scientific models or procedures (Bryman 2008). An interpretivist view allows for a subjective understanding and interpretation of the social world and actions from the view point of the participants involved. Quantitative methods on the other hand such as questionnaires and surveys would have given breadth, but through the use of predetermined categories, structured methods and statistical interpretations (Patton 2002). With this kind of approach, one could have gained knowledge about the social worlds and actions of the participants, but not understand it and interpret it from their points of views. The differences between the philosophical perspectives of quantitative and qualitative strategy were crucial for the study. “The idea of acquiring an “inside” understanding – the actors’ definitions of the situation – is a powerful central concept for understanding the purpose of qualitative inquiry” (Schwandt 2000:102).

I was interested in allowing “participants to speak in their own voice, to express their own thoughts and feelings, and to determine their own agendas” and this I felt would be accomplished with the use of a qualitative approach (Baker & Hinton 1999:71). The flexibility that qualitative inquiries allow during the research process was essential for my fieldwork because of unexpected and unplanned invitations from principals and teachers to join in at assembly meetings, student gatherings, classrooms and the general school grounds which provided new understandings and information. In contrast to the predefined hypothesis and research designs as in quantitative research, I feel that the depth of the study would have been lost and my flexibility restricted.

Commonalities within literature on methodological strategies relating to qualitative inquiry focuses on in-depth insight and the capturing of significant perspectives, perceptions, views, interpretations, opinions, knowledge, feelings and meanings of the participants (Patton 2002; Bryman 2008; Baker & Hinton 1999; Holloway 1997). In contrast to a quantitative approach which has emphasis on the quantification of data collection and data analysis, qualitative research highlights the importance of words. The research strategy was chosen on the basis of the research questions and the strategy that would provide a relevant framework for answering these questions. Since the objective of this study is to investigate how the educational aspirations of coloured female grade 12 learners at two Mitchells Plain schools are influenced by 1) the school environment and 2) their neighborhood. As the central theme in this thesis is aspirations, which relates to individuals personal dreams and desires, the use

of a qualitative in-depth research approach was deemed the most appropriate and it provides the basis for this thesis and its findings.

4.2 The Researcher

Karp and Kendall (1982:250 cited in Atkinson et al. 1994:378) “emphasize what reflexivity requires of the ethnographic researcher-the challenge of ‘turning the anthropological lens back upon the self.’ The process of widening the research lens to include the researcher and her place in the research not only enlarges ‘the fieldworkers conceptual field, but reorganizes it. It poses challenges to the fieldworkers most fundamental beliefs about truth and objectivity.”

According to Patton (2002:64), “a human being is the instrument of qualitative methods.”

When one discusses the concept of reflexivity, which stems from feminist social research, the human being is the instrument used for the collection and analysis of data (Patton 2002, Atkinson et al. 1994). The manner, in which a researcher elicits data, cannot be free from the researcher’s demographic and personal characteristics. Since the researcher is the instrument for data collection and data analysis, the research will be to some extent subjective. However, to address issues of subjectivity, methods such as triangulation can be employed to ensure objectivity but for a research to be completely free from all traces of the researcher seems almost impossible (Atkinson et al. 1994).

In this section I believe it is important to provide the reader with some background information and past experiences about myself in order to fully understand my role as a researcher in the research context. I was born and raised as a coloured girl in Mitchell’s Plain, South Africa. Although the area I grew up in includes people from both low-and middle-class backgrounds, I was fortunate enough to have a middle-class background, despite being from a single parent headed-household. Mitchell’s Plain is where I attended primary school as well as high school. It’s the place where my aspirations were born and where I made choices as a young girl in order to reach my goals. Recollections of my experiences as a girl in a dangerous, violent, gang-ridden environment while struggling to reach my goals remains rooted in me. I recall vividly the challenges and support that I encountered in my family, community and in school. In many ways this research project stems from a personal inquiry into what I have experienced as a high school student and my interest in what the participants in this project have experienced.

The involvement I chose to exercise with the participants was one of conscious choice. I exercised a degree of detachment as well at times when I felt that the atmosphere became unprofessional. The close involvement with the participants gave me the possibility to truly understand what the participants were saying and meaning without having my own views projected on them. This aided in a better and deeper understanding.

4.2.1 A Case study research design

A case study can be defined as an intensive and detailed analysis of a single case such as a location, neighborhoods, schools, groups, cultures or an organization, or even a single person (Bryman 2008, Patton 2002). Patton (2002) defines the case study approach within qualitative analysis as either a process or a product of analysis or both. Whereas, the data collection process takes place in a systematic and comprehensive manner, and with in-depth information of each case of interest results in the product of the analysis. The fieldwork for this case study was carried out in Mitchell's plain, a single location. However, the focus of the research was concerned with the educational aspirations of coloured female learners; Mitchell's Plain provided the backdrop to the findings of the study. The case itself is the influence on the educational aspirations of female coloured learners. The unit of analysis which is the focus of the study is rather the sample than the place itself (Bryman 2008). Relating back to the objective of this study I attempt to explore possible influences of the following two variables, that is school climate and neighborhood (located in Mitchell's Plain) on the educational aspirations of coloured female learners (the object of interest in its own right).

Yin (1994) makes distinctions between various types of case studies. One type of case study that is of particular interest for this study is the exemplifying case. “ The notion of exemplification implies that cases are often chosen not because they are extreme or unusual in some way, but because either they epitomize a broader category of cases or they will provide a suitable context for certain research questions to be answered” (Yin 1994:56).

By choosing an exemplifying case study, I was provided with a suitable context for answering my research questions. Examining the research questions for this study:

- 1) How does the school environment influence educational aspirations of coloured female learners?
- 2) How does living in one of the Cape Flats disadvantaged neighborhoods, Mitchell's Plain, influence educational aspirations of coloured learners?

Both questions reference to a specific group of people and place. Schools are located within certain neighborhoods, here being Mitchell's Plain. For this study, my cases are two groups of girls from two schools. I drafted a preliminary set of characteristics for the participants in this study before embarking on my fieldwork, which will be presented later in chapter five. The research questions call for purposeful sampling which entails certain criteria in the selection of the unit of analysis and the context. I will now discuss the sampling strategy used in more detail.

4.3 Sampling Strategy: Place and Participants

"Going into the field means having a direct and personal contact with people under study in their own environments" (Patton 2002:48).

Due to my personal background and past experiences, I used my knowledge about the research site, schools and the culture of the participants to my advantage during the planning of the research project. I spent two months living in Mitchells Plain during my fieldwork. The research questions in this study make direct reference to a certain category of people and a place. Therefore, I found purposive sampling strategy to be fundamental in the selection of the unit of analysis for this study. Probability sampling as used in quantitative inquiries would not have been an effective and relevant sampling choice because the aim for this study is not to generalize to a wider population but to specify the findings to two groups of coloured female learners in two high schools in Mitchell's Plain (Bryman 2008). Since, my interest was not to generalize to a greater population; I opted for purposeful random sampling as to increase the credibility of the results. Patton (2002) states that the "purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" and that "the purpose of a small random sample is credibility, not representativeness" (Patton 2002:240-241).

The purposive sampling procedure involved two stages, each stage taking into consideration various criteria. Stage one was contextual, which included the demographic characteristic and the socio-economic levels of the schools and participants. Research sites were situated five minutes from each other in the suburb of Rocklands, Mitchell's Plain. No major discrepancies in the socio-economic make-up of neither the research population nor the schools were found (see chapter five for detailed information).

Stage two consisted of criteria related to the unit of analysis. These criteria included the social background, gender and grade level of the participants (Bryman 2008). According to Bryman, this kind of sampling is: “conducted with reference to the goals of the research, so that the units of analysis are selected in terms of criteria that will allow the research questions to be answered” (Bryman 2008:376).

There is a total of 84 learners in grade 12 at Glenville High⁵, 58 of them are girls. Spuridge⁶ High has a total of 129 grade 12 learners whereof 86 are girls. In total 10 girls from each school, aged between 17-19 years participated in the study, which represented more than 10 percent of the total population of grade 12 female learners at each school. All the participants are from the coloured population of Mitchell’s Plain and in their last year of high school, grade 12. I found it more likely that grade 12 high school learners, more so than primary school learners were aware of their academic ability, as well as future educational aspirations.

Principals and teachers were not interviewed directly but through day-to-day informal conversations, interactions and observations, relevant information and perspectives related to the research topic was gathered (Patton 2002).

4.4 Research Methods

Every researcher needs some kind of tool or instrument to collect data. A research method is basically a technique for collecting ones data (Bryman 2008). The techniques that I used to gather data for the research were focus group discussions, observations and semi-structured questionnaires. I conducted focus group discussions at each school with ten girls in each group. Observations of the school environments were made at every opportunity I had on the premises. Semi- structured questionnaires were not directly related to the research topic but more to the ethical considerations of this study which will be discussed in more detailed at the closing of this chapter. For now, I will start off with discussing each of the data collection methods while taking into consideration both the advantages and limitations of each technique.

⁵ Please note that the school names used in this study is purely fictitious as to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

⁶Please note that the school names used in this study is purely fictitious as to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

4.4.1 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions acted as the primary data collection method. Morgan (1997) defines focus groups as a “research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (Morgan 1997:6). This kind of research activity encompasses various elements, which include interaction, discussion or debates within a group but those interactions should be structured and focused. Participants are usually selected for the specific aim of the research project and groups are composed of individuals that share a similar background and common interest (Baker & Hinton 1995). During the sampling strategy process attention was given to the homogeneity of the sample group, educational aspirations were selected as a common theme for discussion.

There are certain advantages and limitations of focus groups. One of the limitations is the issue of control over the proceedings. The question of how much free rein should be allowed to the research participants and how involved the moderator should be. Research participants might often get a feeling of ‘ownership’ if and when allowed to control the proceedings. This might open for a free and more relaxed discussion in the group. However, it can also allow for research participants to dwell off topic, making the task of transcribing and analyzing time-consuming and tedious.

I anticipated that some form of management of the interview process would be needed due to the amount of participants. To uphold focus in the focus group interviews, three core matters were narrowed in on. These were 1) to explore the nature of educational aspirations of the participants (typology), 2) to see what kind of knowledge the participants had in regards to further studies and opportunities available to them, 3) how the participants perceive and experience living in Mitchell’s Plain. This kind of method seemed fruitful as it allowed the group to confer, agree, disagree and discuss around issues pertaining to such knowledge and experiences (Patton 2002).

Another limitation of focus groups is that of group effects. This may occur when prominent speakers drum out the discreet speakers causing the view or opinion of the prominent speaker onto the group (Bryman 2008). Focus group discussions made it easier to probe participants for more elaborate responses. It was easier to get the viewpoint of all participants rather than only from the “talkative” ones by making eye contact and directing questions to the not so talkative participants (Patton 2002).

An additional limitation and issue that I encountered was that of recording and transcribing the focus group discussions. A Dictaphone was used during the focus group discussions, which lasted for approximately an hour each. Certain issues and challenges were encountered during the tape recordings such as background noise, echo in the room, participants speaking very softly or sometimes giggling or coughing. I became aware of this during the recording process. In order not to lose or miss out on valuable data, I often repeated what the participant said and encouraged them to speak up. Notes were taken on what I felt was relevant, insightful and important as well as formulating follow up questions to ongoing talks without disrupting the flow of the conversation (Patton 2002).

4.4.2 Observations

Observations were used as another data collection method. The observation of the school environment was a vital part of my research. My research question makes direct reference to the school environment. The findings from my observations would set the context of research, but also reveal possible influences on the educational aspirations of the participants. I was therefore quite observant of what was going on around me but also about my role as an observer.

The role of the observer can be differentiated along the lines of the relation the observer has to the social setting and its members. The degree of involvement with and detachment from members of the social setting are the two dimensions of the role of the observer as classified by Gold (1958 cited in Bryman 2008:410). I opted for the role of a participant observer. I was interested not only in the feel or atmosphere of the school but more importantly the relationships to be found in the field (ongoing access). One of the criteria as a participant observer is that the members of the social setting are aware of your status as a researcher. The second criterion is that the researcher is involved in interactions with members of the social setting on a regular basis.

The participants were well aware of my status as a researcher. This was made clear during a Monday morning assembly at Glenville high school where the principal introduced me in to all the learners and staff members. He stated my name and my reason for my presence on the school. At Spuridge high, the principal announced over the intercom about my presence and reason for being on school. He also informed grade 12 learners that I would be in contact with them. There are certain jeopardies involved with the role I opted for as an observer. Due to the

introduction of my status to the whole school, I was at risk for being over-identified (Bryman 2008).

However, I experienced that my presence and interactions with learners and teachers as respectful, helpful and open. I felt welcomed into their schools which provided me with a better opportunity of getting closer to the members of the social setting. The advantage of having ones presence and status known was that often teachers, principals and learners would interact with me for an occasional conversation which exposed valuable data. The jotting down of field notes during observations was done discretely as possible. Once I left the research sites, I made sure to write full, thick, rich and descriptive field notes which supplemented the scratch notes collected at the end of each research day (Bryman 2008).

4.4.1 Inductive Approach

I used an inductive approach for this study as to allow theory to develop from my findings. The data analysis strategy and the framework that was used for the analysis of my data were influenced by a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory may often be used synonymously with that of inductive approach which implies that an analyst has “grounded his or her theory in data” (Patton 2002:541). A deductive approach might have restricted my interpretation of the data and my fieldwork if I had pre-determined theories and literature. However, as to frame the research, I relied on broad ideas and principles drawn from existing literature and theory that acted as a guideline in the field. Discovering patterns, themes, and categories in ones data is what inductive analysis is comprised of as described by Patton (2002). There are certain processes, tools and outcomes within inductive analysis and this will be elaborated on below.

The purposes for using an inductive approach can be summarized into three main points as follows:”(1) to condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format; (2) to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data and (3) to develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in the raw data” (Thomas 2003:1).

The tools and the processes used in the analysis of the data started off with a preliminary analytical device that was developed prior to entering the field in addition to my research

questions. Drawing from previous research studies and my literature review, the outcome was the model presented below which provided a good starting point for framing the research, it also proved valuable in accessing the socio-economic background of the participants.

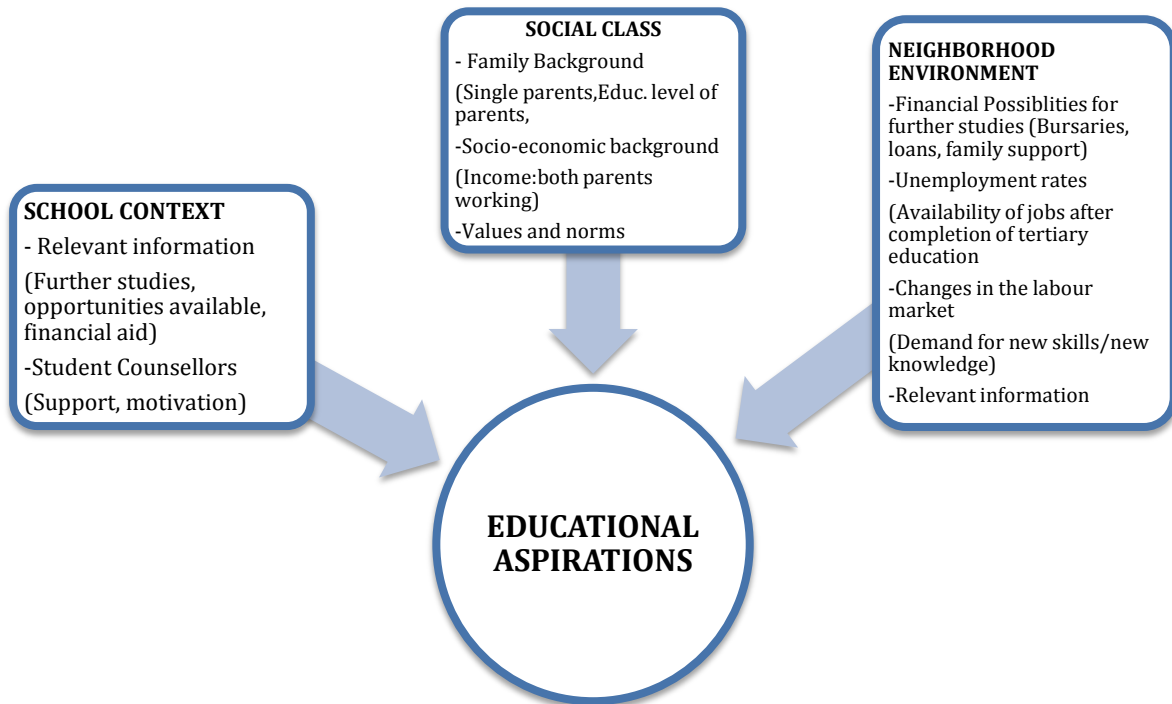


Figure 4.1: Preliminary analytic device

My preliminary analytic device was deemed useful, not only during my fieldwork but also during my data analysis. While using my analytical device during my data analysis, I focused on two main themes, coinciding with the specific objectives of this thesis, in addition to emerging themes deriving from my data. The two main focus areas were the:

- 1) School Environment: What kind of information did learners receive about further studies, opportunities available and application procedures? Did they receive support and motivation from teachers, counselors and the school?
- 2) Neighborhood Environment: What do the participants think of their neighborhood? How does the neighborhood environment affect them and their educational aspirations, if any?

The data from my study will be presented in chapter five, followed by the discussion of my findings. For now, I would like to describe my data analysis process.

4.4.2 Analysis Process

Once the focus group discussions and field observations were done, it was then time for transcribing. The two sets of tape-recorded focus group discussions were first transcribed word for word. As to reduce the vast amount of raw data, idea clusters or key themes were identified. Similar comments made by the participants were then grouped under a category until the amount of data was reduced to manageable data or what Morgan (1997) calls processed data. The data began to become more organized and controllable once the coding process was done. Coding can be defined as the fragmentation or breaking down of data into various concepts and then categories while constantly making comparisons between the concepts and its indicators (Patton 2002). "Data interpretation and analysis involve making sense out of what people have said, looking for patterns, putting together what is said in one place with what is said in another place, and integrating what different people have said" (Patton 2002:380). Through a content analysis of the interview transcriptions, various patterns emerged. Recurring regularities and consistencies materialized during the open coding process, which I then ascribed suitable themes to. Once themes were established, several cross checks of compatibility between patterns and themes were done as to verify the meaning, consistency, value and accuracy of the data (Patton 2002). The analysis process was a back and forth procedure. From the large amount of raw data to breaking it up and putting it together like a puzzle while cross-checking with audio files, transcriptions and field notes and then relating back to my research questions. The back and forth interaction with the data provided me with the findings of this thesis. My research questions relate to two central themes, that is 1) school environment and 2) neighborhood environment. During the coding process, I focused on these two main themes and coded the interview transcriptions according to variables pertaining to these categories which guided my coding process.

4.5 Reliability and Validity

There are certain criteria within qualitative research and Brock-Utne (1996:613) simplistically describes the everyday use of the broad conception of reliability and validity. In everyday speech, "valid" refers to the truth and correctness of a statement. An argument may be considered valid, strong and convincing, or invalid and illegitimate. A person may be described as reliable, dependable and trustworthy.

However, simplistically the quote above is put; the concepts of reliability and validity have been up for much controversial discussion and debate in methodological theory. Reliability and validity are terms that are traditionally associated with assessing the quality of quantitative research. There has been difference in opinion on the appropriateness of these terms as measures for quality assessment of qualitative research (Kleven 2008; Brock-Utne 1996; Bryman 2008; Guba & Lincoln 1994). The well-known concepts trustworthiness and authenticity has been substituted and adapted for terms of reliability and validity in qualitative research by authors such as Guba and Lincoln (1994).

4.5.1 Trustworthiness of the study

Trustworthiness is compromised by four criteria which can be comparable to the corresponding criteria of reliability and validity in quantitative research. These four criteria are credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability) and confirmability (objectivity) (Guba & Lincoln 1994, Bryman 2008).

Credibility refers to the likelihood of the findings of the study. Does the researcher's own interpretation of the findings actually mean what the subjects were actually saying? As an attempt to ensure the trustworthiness criterion of the credibility of my findings, I employed data and theory triangulation (Patton 2002). Triangulation involves the use of more than one data source or data collection methods (Bryman 2008). I crosschecked the data from my interview transcripts to that of my observation field notes. In addition to an extensive literature review which provided multiple theoretical perspectives that aided in the interpretation of various sets of data. Using a combination of methods and data sources, I trusted that it would assist with the strengthening of the credibility of the study.

Transferability relates to the issue of generalization over situations, persons, contexts and over time. This kind of external validity as used in quantitative research, questions the validity of the implications from the immediate context of the study to a broader context or additional contexts. In other words, can the findings of the study be applied to other social settings? It is therefore vital that qualitative researchers provide thick and full descriptions in order to provide a record to other researchers who can then decide if the findings can be transferred to other situations (Kleven 2008, Bryman 2008, Guba & Lincoln 1994). The aim of the study is not to generalize my findings to greater population but to relate it to the two specific groups

of participants in this study; it is for the users of my study to determine if it is applicable for them.

Dependability involves the documentation and the accessibility of the steps taken in the research process. This is to ensure that the research was carried out with objectivity and that the proper procedures were followed (Patton 2002, Bryman 2008, Guba & Lincoln 1994). I have kept detailed records of the research steps for the study, in addition to the safe keeping of digital and written documents. Confirmability is the need to ensure the researcher has conducted the research with as complete objectivity as possible. The research procedures and processes of this project are stored and available upon request.

Authenticity relates to the impact and practical outcomes of the research. Authenticity addresses issues pertaining to fairness of the representation of the participants' views, deeper understanding of the topic and influence or empowerment to change due to the research (Guba & Lincoln 1994, Bryman 2008, Patton 2002). To address the issue of authenticity, I used an open-ended questionnaire. This method I found it to be a good way to investigate if my research had any impact on the participants. Participants received the questionnaires two weeks after the focus group interviews. The main reason for doing this was to see if the questions that I raised in the group interviews have changed the thought or impacted the participants' future decisions regarding their educational goals in any way.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

“Social scientists do not have an inalienable right to conduct research involving people. That we continue to have the freedom to conduct such work is, in large part, the product of individual and social goodwill and depends on us acting in ways that are not harmful and are just” (Israel & Hay 2006:3).

Israel and Hay (2006) write about why ethics count in social research. The authors point out the importance of an ethical behavior that contributes to protecting others, minimizing harm and to increase the sum of good. In this project, emphasis was placed on 1) voluntary informed consent from participants which included confidentiality and privacy and 2) potential harm to the participants.

A prevalent issue within social research ethics is the question of how informed is an informed consent form (Bryman 2008). To ensure that the correct ethical measures were followed, an

informed consent form was created. This included whom the researcher was, the background and purpose of the research, the methods that would be used, that participation was voluntary and that there is no relationship between participant's academic work and participation.

Participants agreed voluntarily to participate in the study. Information was given to participants both in writing and orally that they could withdraw or decline from the study at any time and that no negative consequences would befall them academically. Participants who chose to participate, delivered signed consent forms with their own signature if they were 18 years and older and their parents/guardians signature if they were under 18 years old. Confidentiality, anonymity and privacy were ensured in writing and verbally.

Research permission and data protection measures were undertaken both in Norway and South Africa prior to fieldwork. Registration with the data protection official for research at the Norwegian Social Science Data Services in Norway was completed. An application to conduct research in public schools in South Africa was approved by the Western Cape Education Department research services.

5 DATA PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter will introduce the data collected from my fieldwork which took place in Mitchell's Plain in Cape Town, South Africa between the periods of September 2011 to October 2011. The raw data material consisted of two focus group discussions with a total of 20 coloured female learners as my main group of participants, informal talks with principals and teachers and extracts from my daily journal relating to the school and neighborhood environment. The data for this study will mainly be presented comparatively in tables with responses from each school under the same theme. I will start by giving a contextual overview of the neighborhood environment of the participants and their schools. Thereafter, a short presentation of the school profiles and socio-economic backgrounds of the participants. Subsequently, data on the educational aspirations of the participants will be introduced followed by the theme on the availability of relevant information and career advice available at each school with focus on the Life Orientation (LO) curriculum (see section 5.2.1 for information on this). This is then followed by the views of what teachers and principals think of the aspirations and futures of the learners at their schools. Then, data relating to the learners views on the benefits of education and how they believe they can reach their goals will follow. Lastly, a short summary will be given as to draw all the central points from the data. The purpose of the present study was to determine which possible factors within the school environment might influence educational aspirations and secondly, whether or not the neighborhood environment of the participants and their schools had any influence on their educational aspirations.

Note that the focus group participants will not be referred to by name, but by numbers such as focus group 1 (fg1) and focus group 2 (fg2) due to certain aspects from the confidentiality agreement, already mentioned. Fictitious names for the schools will be used, here being Glenville high (fg1) and Spuridge high (fg2) respectively.

5.1 The neighborhood environment: situating the schools

The place or space in which the schools are situated in and the social context of the participants cannot be overlooked in this study given that I was interested in knowing how the participants experienced their neighborhood and what kind of environment their schools were located in. The importance and relevance of the social context for this study relates to previous research studies with a focus on the influence of contextual level factors or neighborhood effects on young people's aspirations which suggest that young people from deprived communities and socially disadvantaged backgrounds tend to have lower educational aspirations, ambitions and expectations (Cabinet Office 2008, Wilson 1987, Stewart et al 2007). Research also suggests that the effects of deprived neighborhoods have a negative effect on educational outcomes and aspirations (Wilson 1987, 1996, Stewart et al 2007, Crowder & South 2003). Furthermore, the importance of social networks and social ties within communities and neighborhoods may possibly influence the beliefs, values, attitudes and aspirations of youth living there (Cabinet Office 2008). Since the assumption of research studies have concluded with various factors of neighborhood influences on educational aspirations, I wanted to see what the participants thought about their neighborhood as a way to explore possible influences. Below are some of the views and experiences of the participants in their neighborhoods which correspond to the question: *how would you describe your neighborhood?*

Spuridge High

It's not not dangerous (fg1 09.2011).

Ja! Like it was last weekend I think ne, the gangsters were shooting like crazy! Yor, you could just hear babababa! (fg1 09.2011).

You know our neighbors boy, he is maybe 7 years old and he was playing in the park around five or six o'clock and then there was a shoot out between two gangs and a bullet just passed his head, he has a line across his head now where the bullet passed! Yor, that kid is lucky because he could have been dead! (fg1 09.2011).

My friend was robbed on her way to school. She was late one morning and I think it was five or six guys who stopped her on the corner in the gangetjie (narrow hallway). They had a knife, there was nothing she could do and she had to give her two gold rings and cell phone to them (fg1 09.2011).

That is why I don't wear my jewelry to school (fg1 09.2011).

It's better to give your stuff to them instead of making the matter worse. Like say if she doesn't want to give her stuff, they can like stab her or maybe even rape her, things like that are happening here (fg1 09.2011).

Glenville High

It's a lot of shootings (fg2 10.2011).

There is alot of gangsterism (fg 2 10.2011).

I feel so sorry for my auntie's friend, she is a hairdresser and goes to people's houses to do their hair. She was walking late one Saturday night coming from one of her clients across the field with her hair dryer in her bag and then these two guys tried to rob her. She was fighting with them and didn't want to give her hairdryer to them because that's how she makes her living ne. One of the guys hit her with a brick over her head. She came to my auntie's house with a lot of blood in her head, she had to get eight stitches! (fg2 10.2011).

There is a lot of poverty and gangsterism but that doesn't necessarily mean that you have to go in that path. Like to me that just show me that that is not what I want to be because you see how they [gangsters] are (fg2 10.2011).

I am probably the only one of my friends who is finishing high school and the rest of them, one is pregnant, one has a child, and they sit on the corner smoking, things like that. You learn to stay away from it, you still friends with them but you learn not to go or the lines you won't cross (fg2 10.2011).

Both groups of participants described their neighborhood as a place with high criminal incidents, poverty and gangsterism. The participants gave vivid descriptions of incidents such as robbery and shootings that have happened to people close to them in their neighborhoods and to friends. Shootings between gang members were identified as a common factor and a frequent occurrence in their neighborhood. One of the participants describes Mitchell's Plain as follows:

I like to think of Mitchell's Plain just like Darwinism at its best because everyone in Mitchell's Plain has adapted to survive. If you come from the outside, it will freak you out, it will knock the breath out of you but if you grew up here it won't [knock the breath out of you] (fg1 09.2011).

She refers to Mitchell's Plain as a place where people have learned to survive but she also points out that if one enters the neighborhood as an outsider, it would be an experience that "will knock the breath out of you." My accommodation during my fieldwork was in Mitchell's Plain as to have easy access to the schools and get a sense of the neighborhood of

the participants and the schools. I kept a daily journal as to record my observations and experiences of the neighborhood. Below are some extracts from my journal:

It is 03:43 am Saturday morning. I can hear gunshots being fired. This continues until 04:20 am.

Friday evening 20:17, gunshots are being fired. At 20:56 police and ambulance sirens can be heard.

Monday, 16:45 pm, I have just returned from the tuck shop to buy a liter of milk. Two teenage boys started quarreling; the one pulls out a knife and the other boy starts throwing bricks violently towards him. I get hit on my leg by one of the flying bricks that were thrown. I appeared to be invisible to the two boys.

Wednesday, 15:05, I heard a commotion outside. I went out to see what was going on. I see a crowd of people surrounding a boy who looks to be around the age of 18-19 years old. He is brutally beaten. He is covered with blood, swollen and blue. He was apparently attacked by a group of boys with a baseball bat, a spade and bricks. They kicked him in his face. They have mistaken him for another person who apparently has robbed a nearby tuck shop.

The extracts above from my personal journal are only a few of the many incidents that I have witnessed and experienced. My observations and experiences were much in line with the responses from the participants when describing their neighborhood. Shootings, gang violence and criminal activities were a common feature within this neighborhood. Relaying back to my contextual framework in chapter two; one can comfortably say that the neighborhood in this study, Mitchell's Plain, is a high-crime neighborhood, and that youth in this study are exposed to violent and illegal activities.

5.1.1 Positive neighborhood views

The participants described their neighborhood and the surrounding areas of their schools as a dangerous place. However, they also viewed their neighborhood as a positive place with good social networks, which made them feel safe. They expressed positive neighborhood characteristics and experiences:

The whole community is like a family even with all the danger and they watch out for you (fg1 09.2011).

Like everyone knows everyone in Mitchells Plain (fg1 09.2011).

Say I leave my house and I forgot to lock the door, I can come home from school and then my neighbor will tell me this and that person was here for you they went inside but I pulled them out (fg2 10.2011).

You know last weekend I went to visit my friend on that side of the station and when I got home, everyone in my street knew that I was in that area! Here everyone knows your business. Also like, I will meet someone and they will know my granny or my uncle or someone in my family (fg1 09.2011).

Participants pointed out how social networks in their community “watched out” for them. They felt safe that people in different areas of their neighborhood knew their relatives. Both groups of participant’s were aware about what criminal activities, criminal entities and danger were in their neighborhood. One of the participants stated that being surrounded by violence and criminal activities makes you:

stronger and street smart (fg1 09.2011).

This is because:

you know where to walk around, you know where people stand on corners and how you must walk away from that corner (fg2 09.2011).

you also know that you cannot walk late at night or walk alone over fields, especially on weekends because then you will definitely meet trouble! (fg2 09.2011).

Like it is common sense in a way, we know the area and where the gangsters will hang out (fg1 10.2011).

Both groups of participants did not give any indication of fear but they acknowledged the danger and violence in their neighborhoods. There were no major differences from the way they viewed and experienced their neighborhoods. Furthermore, the social ties within their community gave them a sense of safety. They were knowledgeable about safe and unsafe places, times of the day it was safe to be out and different gang territories that were to be avoided. From the data, it appeared that the neighborhood environment of the participants and their schools did not have a direct affect on their aspirations but that the nature of their environment however dangerous, oddly enough, gave them a sense of feeling safe.

5.1.2 School Profiles

although poor educational outcomes have been concentrated in poor urban contexts, it is now becoming clear through the work of certain geodemographic researchers that the spatial dispersion of educational success within these contexts is not consistent between areas, with some equally poor urban neighborhoods demonstrating differentially better or worse educational outcomes and levels of progression onto higher education (Raffo 2011: 2).

Glenville and Spuridge high are two public high schools, located only three kilometers from each other in Mitchell's Plain. Below is a comparative table that explores the student-teacher ratios, government aid per learner, school fees per annum, the ethnicity and sex of the learners attending the schools.

	Spuridge high	Glenville high
Educators	42	35
Learners	1283	1024
Sex	Mixed	Mixed
Ethnic mix	Majority coloured	Majority coloured
School status	Compulsory public	Compulsory public
Govn. aid per learners	337 ZAR	453 ZAR
School fees	1075 ZAR p/a	800 ZAR p/a

Table 5.1 Case study schools

These schools share a similar infrastructure and student composition. Small discrepancies exist between the amount of school fees and government aid per learner but this is balanced out by the student-teacher ratio. Even though there are small discrepancies between the two schools, they share the same geographical area. The data from the school profiles laid the basis for a comparative analysis between the two schools because there were no major differences in the composition of the schools. If a comparative analysis should have been made between a private vs. public school and white vs. coloured student population, I anticipate that clear differences would have been evident.

5.1.3 Participant Backgrounds

As to explore the socio-economic backgrounds of the participants and to rule out any major discrepancies between the two groups of participants, I looked at matters pertaining to the family composition, the number of people employed in their home, and the educational levels of parents. Family composition consisted of how many of the participants lived with both their mother and father. The number of people employed in their home consisted of how many adults were working and providing an income to the household. The educational levels of parents comprised of the number of parents who completed a tertiary level education.

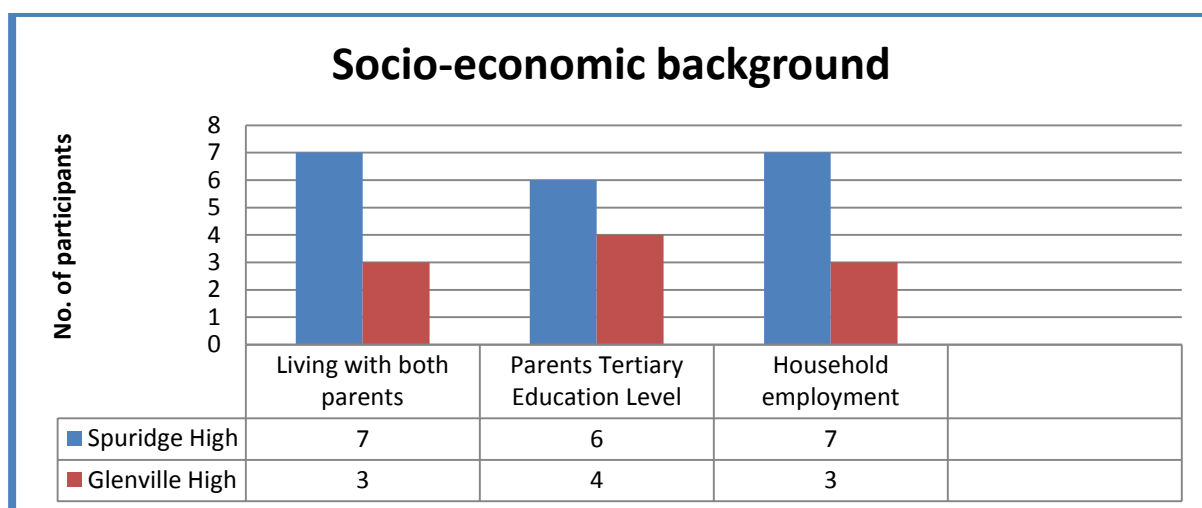
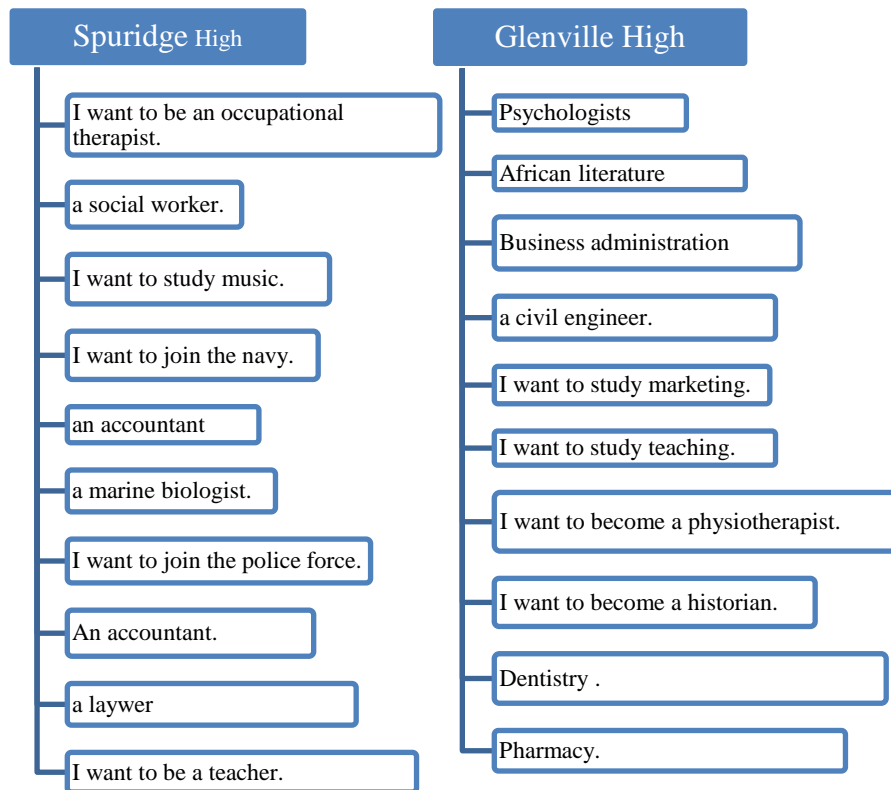


Table 5.2 Participants socio-economic background

Research with a focus on the influence of family-level attributes have suggested that the higher the educational level of parents are, the higher financial resources a family possess, the more likely it is for their child to have high aspirations. Also, that youth from single parent headed households are less likely to have high aspirations (Cabinet Office 2008, Wilson 1992, Crowder & Smith 2003). The findings from this study show that participants from Spuridge high had a more nuclear family composition, more educated parents and more employed adults working in their household compared to those at Glenville high. However, contrary to the assumptions of previous research relating to the influence of family-level attributes on educational aspirations, both groups of participants in this study showed high aspirations despite the differences in family-level attributes as illustrated in 5.1.4.

5.1.4 Participant's educational aspirations

What are your educational aspirations? What are your dreams and goals for the future? What do you want to do after high school? These were the questions I asked the participants and below are their responses:



The participants at both schools expressed their educational aspirations and the kinds of goals they had for their futures. Their aspirations varied from different educational fields. Unlike the assumptions from previous research studies that stipulate that youth from disadvantaged neighborhoods and schools situated in deprived communities tend to have lower educational aspirations, expectations and ambitions (Stewart et al. 2007, Herzog 1982, Majoribanks 1984, Wilson & Wilson 1992, Wilson 1987), both groups of participants expressed their aspirations and goals for the future.

5.2 The School Environment

As described earlier, there are certain perceptions of the school environments of schools located in disadvantaged neighborhoods. One of the principle concepts that as presented in chapter two, the school environment was defined as follow 1) the learning environment in relation to career advice and 2) the availability of relevant information. The importance of

providing relevant information and career advice to youth does not only provide them with knowledge about how to achieve their goals but such information can also be used as a tool for success, change and progress. The importance of knowledge and information is illuminated by former UN General Secretary Kofi Annan as follows, “Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family” (Annan 1997). My objective relating to the school environment was to find out whether or not learners were provided with relevant information and career advice about further studies, opportunities available; financial aid and application procedures for bursaries and loans.

5.2.1 Availability of Relevant Information and Career Advice

I chose to focus on the link between the availability of relevant information and career advice to the educational content and learning outcomes of the Life Orientation (LO) subject as a way to explore the kind of knowledge the participants were expected to be equipped with. I chose LO because it is one of the four compulsory subjects for grades 10, 11 and 12, which are in use at both of the schools, and it is the primary subject relating to career advice and career choices.

The Department of Education defines LO as follows:

Life Orientation guides and prepares learners for life, and for its responsibilities and possibilities. This subject addresses knowledge, values, attitudes and skills about the self, the environment, responsible citizenship, a healthy and productive life, social engagement, recreation and physical activity, and career choices. It equips learners to solve problems, to make informed decisions and choices, and to take appropriate actions to enable them to live meaningfully and successfully in a rapidly-changing society (DoE 2003:9).

Furthermore, one of the four focus areas in the LO curriculum is Careers and Career choices.

The learning outcome within this area is that:

learners are expected to reflect continuously on their own interests and abilities as well as career and entrepreneurial options as they move towards finalising their choice of a career. They have to critically evaluate socio-economic factors, additional and higher education options, and access to financial assistance to finalise a career choice. As learners at this stage are about to enter

the world of work, relevant employment legislation, how to access it, and dealing with unemployment are studied (DoE 2003:13).

In addition, specific learning outcomes are stated under Careers and Career choices for grade 12 learners. Term 1 and term 4 are of particular interest because it sets out clear and specific objectives and outcomes of what learners are expected to know in each of these terms that relates to higher education.

Term 1	Term 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to a decision taken: job or course application for additional or higher education, skills for final action (availability of funds, completing forms, accommodation and travel arrangements), locate appropriate work or study opportunities from various sources and determine requirements for acceptance and possible challenges. • Strategies to achieve goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refinement of portfolio of plans for life after school: record of plans and progress towards achievement of those plans. • Admission requirements for degree/diploma or higher certificate for the intended field of study. • Details of identified institutions that offer finance for the intended course(s): option 1 and 2. • Identified possible employment opportunities. • Letters of application and responses for employment/study/bursary. • A short CV, for application for part-time or full-time employment or for a bursary.

Table 5.3 Learning outcomes for grade 12

Source: Department of Education (DoE 2003).

The overall learning outcome for grade 12 learners in the LO curriculum statement is that the “learner is able to demonstrate self-knowledge and the ability to make informed decisions regarding further study, career fields and career pathing” (DoE 2003:32). From the learning objectives and outcomes in LO, learners are expected to have knowledge about how to apply for bursaries, information on what kind of financial resources are available, university entrance requirements and university fees. The objectives in the LO curriculum states that learners are expected to be equipped with a certain set of skills and knowledge pertaining to further education. In exploring the availability and relevance of career information and advice available to the participants from the school, I asked the LO teachers at each school on how the LO subject can prepare learners for their future goals?

Spuridge High

We try and expose the learners to a variety of options and possibilities that are available to them. A few times a year we will invite representatives from various universities to give the learners information on different career choices, financial aid and the kind of grades that they would need. Also as a life orientation teacher, I have discussions with the learners about their future choices and how they plan on going about achieving these goals. Many of the learners will come to me if they have any questions on career choices...and most of the learners know already what they want to do (Female teacher, Spuridge high).

Glenville High

The problem with the learners is that they don't take LO as a serious subject, for them it's free time to do homework for their other classes. This just shows that they are not serious about their future. Like I will hand out brochures from colleges and universities but this will just lay in their bags. I think a lot of them don't think they will go to university because of the financial issues (Female teacher, Glenville high).

The LO teacher at Spuridge high explained to me that the school invites representatives from various tertiary institutions as to inform the learners about different career choices and financial possibilities available to them. She further adds that her role as a LO teacher is to discuss and plan with the learners about their future career choices and about how they will achieve their goals. The learners will approach her whenever they have any questions regarding career choices. Whereas the LO teacher from Glenville high states that the learners do not take the LO subject seriously. She points out that learners are not serious about their futures nor the LO subject. She then adds that financial issues are one of the important reasons why learners are not pursuing higher education. The data from the two LO teacher's highlight differences in relation to how each of the teachers views their learners and their roles as educators. This also indicates and highlights the school culture of the schools as discussed in my framework.

When examining the content in the LO curriculum and the objectives of what kind of knowledge learners are expected to be equipped with, I asked each of the focus groups questions relating to financial possibilities such as loans and bursaries, university fees and how to go about applying for these. I was interested in knowing what kind of information they received about higher education from their school.

Spuridge High

[We can] apply for bursaries and loans to help us because all of us cannot get loans (fg1 09.2011).

Actually the bursaries are normally converted into student loans, so if you do well enough, a percentage is converted into a loan and another percentage is bursary, not all bursaries works like that, just certain types (fg1 09.2011).

It's initially a loan, depending on your grades then they can convert up to 40 % to a bursary (fg1 09.2011).

They [teachers] help with the bursary applications and they also tell, it's like they basically trying to prepare you about your experiences at university and they help you trust a lot (fg1 .09.2011).

They [teachers] will motivate you a little to get there where you want to be to attain-----to the specific university and the specific career you want to be in (fg1. 09.2011).

they [teachers] will tell you how to adapt to varsity life and what qualities you need and the type of character to have to kind of survive at varsity (fg1. 09.2011).

Like I said, our school is extremely privileged like there is a lot of colleges and universities that come out to help us fill out the application forms. Any problems you had, they helped us with that. Some universities actually paid for the application fees like UCT and Stellenbosch (fg1 09.2011).

At least thrice a year they [representatives from tertiary institutions] will come (fg 1. 09.2011).

Lots of universities have like come out to our schools and like offered to, like career expos and stuff like that and like chatted to a lot of different colleges (fg1 09.2011).

Like there are a lot of universities and technikons that come in to give extra tutor to the learners (fg1 09.2011).

Visited campuses and chats with people about their careers, what you have to do to get to be in that occupation (fg1 09.2011)

Glenville High

We just thinking of what we want to do, our goal and not the finances and the stuff we have to do (fg2 10.2011).

That's my mommy's department (fg2 10.2011).

My daddy can take a loan if I don't get a student loan because your parents can qualify for a loan (fg2 10.2011)

They [parents] probably have some savings for you (fg2 10.2011).

From my LO teacher, if I have questions I can go to her and she will like do research for me or she will tell me what to do (fg2 10.2011).

And when it comes to bursaries, she [Miss Y] makes the effort to go to the internet (fg2 10.2011).

I can also ask my miss to write me a uh job letter, an application and then I can go [to job shadowing] myself (fg2 10.2011).

Our life-orientation teacher but um she gives it [information about university open days] to you and then it's like your job to like go and uh like open days and things like that. She tells you when it is and then we have to go (fg2 10.2011).

Maybe once or twice a year (fg2 10.2011) and

They [tertiary institutions] mostly like send us stuff (fg2 10.2011).

The responses from the participants at Spuridge high indicate that they were aware about various financial opportunities such as loans and bursaries. Also, the kinds of procedures involved in order to qualify for a bursary. One of the participants explains that depending on one's grades then only a certain percentage may be converted to a bursary. In addition, participants could seek the help of their teachers if they needed assistance with bursary applications. One of the participants points out that their teacher prepared them about the

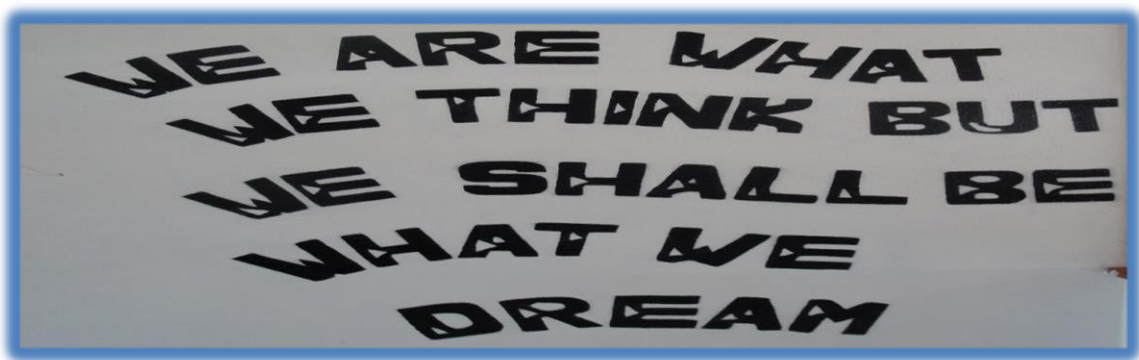
experiences they will encounter at university. As a method to expose learners to additional information besides the learning content in the LO curriculum, the school invited representatives from various tertiary institutions. Learners would then receive information about different career choices, help with bursary applications, extra tutors as well as discussions with people who are in the field that they want to be in. The participants at Spuridge high appeared to be knowledgeable about various mechanisms and processes that were needed to get into higher education. Much of the knowledge and information they had was in line with the learning outcomes as stated in the LO curricula.

On the other hand, the participants at Glenville high did not appear to be very well informed about various application procedures such as financial costs and opportunities available to them compared to the participants at Spuridge high. Many of the participants made reference to their parents being responsible for financing their higher education and they did not appear to be aware of financial opportunities such as loans and bursaries available to them. The responses also indicates that their LO teacher spent her time doing much of the research and inquiries rather than the participants themselves doing the necessary work as specified in the LO curriculum relating to self-knowledge. The LO teacher at Spuridge high, however, would use her time to prepare the learners for university life and to motivate the learners to reach their goals.

Glenville high also invited representatives from tertiary institutions to visit the school, but this only occurred once or twice a year as compared to Spuridge high who invited representatives at least three times a year in addition to extra tutor lessons from university professors and career expos. One of the participants at Glenville high further adds that tertiary institutions mainly send them information about various courses and programs they offer instead of discussing and helping learners with bursary applications as at Spuridge high. The learning objectives as stated in the LO curriculum, that learners need to be equipped with various skills relating to higher education appeared to be somewhat lacking amongst the participants at Glenville high compared to those at Spuridge high.

5.2.2 Principals and Teachers views on learner's aspirations

On entering the administration office at Spuridge high, I was met by phrases painted on the walls of the corridors as illustrated in the pictures below:



The pictures above are only a few of the many inspiring phrases that decorated the walls of the administration office. In addition, photographs of the winning teams in various sports and academic activities which were neatly framed next to each other, hung beside the school's flag. Trophies and medals were tidily displayed in a glass cabinet and one truly gets a sense of the pride the school has for all the accomplishments of the learners. These phrases were not just painted on the wall but it was also what the school was practicing and aiming to instill in their learners. This is illustrated by some of the responses from the principal and teachers when asked about the educational aspirations or educational identities of the learners at their school.

When comparing the corridors of the administration office at Glenville high, they were quite different from that at Spuridge high. Here the walls were decorated with photographs of African writers who were political activists during the time of apartheid, something the principal took much pride in and time to explain. The South African flag is framed in a huge glass frame but there was no school flag to be seen. In addition, a poster of important commemorative dates such as Voting day, Mandela day and Workers day hanged on the wall. It appeared that emphasis on the historical,

political and civic engagement was what the school was trying to instill in their learners rather than the pride of the learners' accomplishments or motivation towards the futures of the learners as illustrated at Spuridge high.



Spuridge High

What we are trying to do is to make the kids understand that they have to work hard; they have to study hard if they want to see results. We cannot force them to have goals but we can try to encourage them, make them believe that anything is possible if they put their mind to it. You need to think big to be big (Principal, Spuridge high).

At our school, we try and teach the learners to excel and do their best at whatever they try to do. Be it tryouts in sports or a maths test. The learners need to believe and understand that through hard work and commitment, they will succeed (Female teacher, Spuridge high).

If you ask the learners if this is a strict school, they will definitely say yes! We have a zero tolerance for negative behavior! Even if you come with an incomplete uniform to school, you will be sent home and their parents will be informed. We want learners to understand that their futures are important and that it starts in their schooling years. By taking schooling serious, they will also take their goals serious (Male teacher, Spuridge high).

We have many former learners who have become very successful and they never forget their roots. Just last week we had a former learner who came to talk to the kids...you know, to motivate them. He is actually a member of parliament now (Male teacher, Spuridge high).

You know, I just had a meeting with one of the mothers and her son. She was at her wits end with her son; she didn't know what to do anymore. The thing is that this kid is actually a good kid, he is a good learner. The problem is that he is influenced by these no good guys in his community and they are a bad influence on him. I called a meeting with his mother because her son is not attending school everyday and his grades are dropping. It is this kind of relationship that is important to maintain between the school and the parents. We have to nip the problem in the bud before the problem escalates (Principal, Spuridge high).

Glenville High

Our school was very politically active during the late eighties and early nineties. This was during the apartheid time. Learners would have demonstrations and boycotts along with the teachers against the apartheid government. We had to fight for a just and equal education! We use to have military vehicles and police vans lined up in front of the school. You see the problem today is that the learners don't care about their future. They don't have anything to fight for, now education is free and everything is just handed to them. Some of them are just lazy! They don't hand in assignments, they don't do their homework, they bunk and when they fail their parents will come and ask why did my child fail? But when parents are called in for meetings, they never have time (Principal, Glenville high).

Well, you can actually see the difference in aspirations between these years' matric learners and those of last year because the school use to organize busses to open days at university but we stopped doing that because we don't have funding for it. This years matric learners just don't care (Female teacher, Glenville high).

There could be a correlation between learners' weak results and parental lack of interest. There is a weak parental attendance at meetings – out of a class of 31 learners, only 5 parents attended the meeting! (Male teacher, Glenville high).

It is a great concern that a great number of learners show a lack of commitment towards their work and a good work ethic is also missing (Female teacher, Glenville high).

Teachers need to win learners over by being more positive, motivating, reflecting on teaching practice, move around more in class and validate the humanity of all learners (Female teacher, Glenville high).

The principal at Spuridge high pointed out what the school can do is to encourage learners to have goals and to teach them that through hard work they can succeed. Responses from teachers included similar beliefs of hard work, commitment and motivation. Parental involvement was seen as another important matter that the

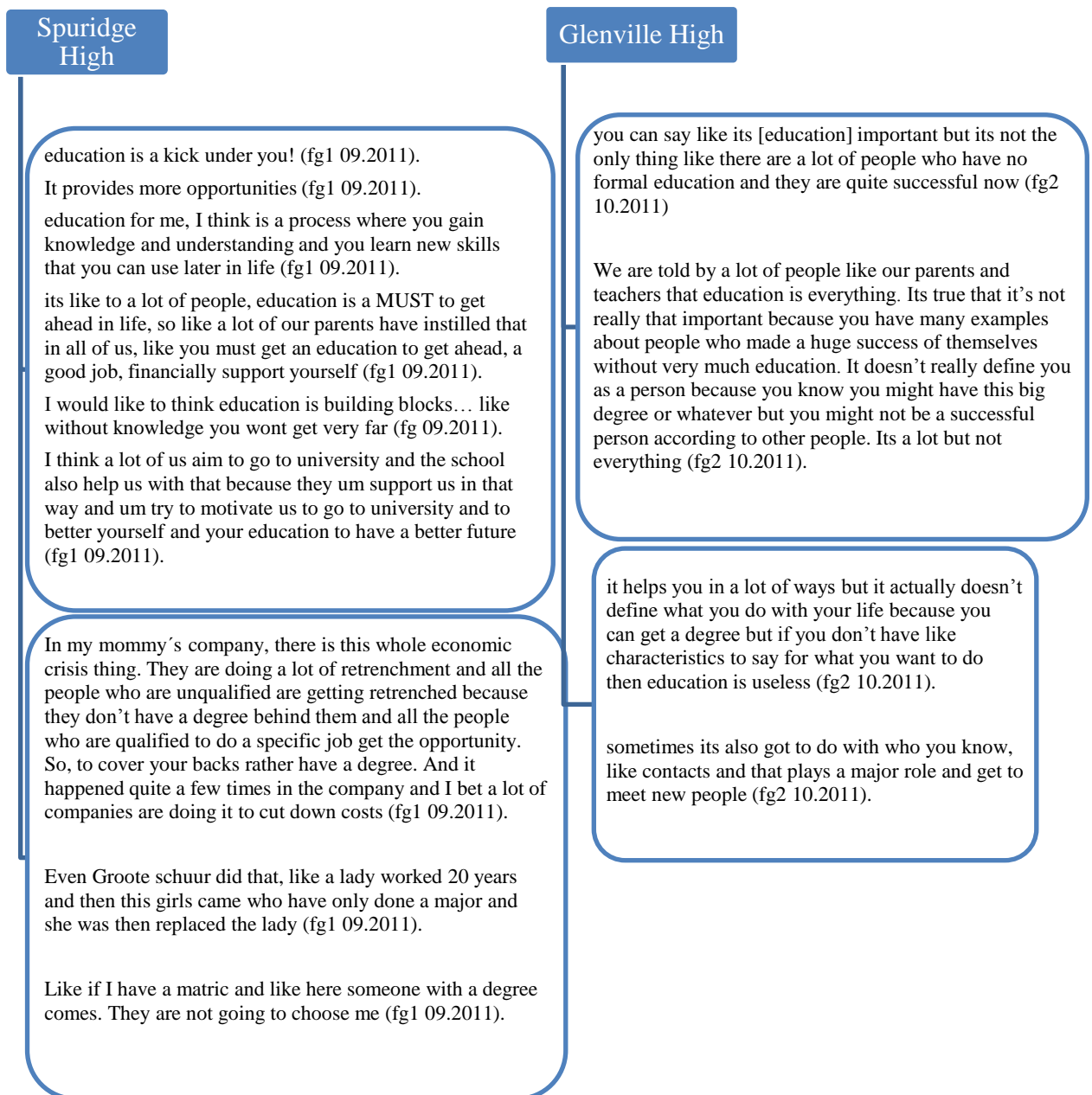
principal felt the school needed to uphold. He points out the importance of maintaining relationships between the school and the parents, but he also emphasizes the importance of taking action once a problem arises with any of the learners. The learner is not seen as the problem but the community where the learner comes from has a negative influence on him.

Whereas the principal at Glenville high pointed out the socio-political and historical changes and differences between learners growing up during apartheid to the learners of today. He explains that because learners do not have to struggle for equality in education, they somehow don't care about their educational futures. Furthermore, he expresses that the relationship between the school and parents are not well established and that parents will only meet up at school when a problem with their child has occurred such as failing a grade.

Data from the principal and teachers at Glenville high about learners' educational aspirations and futures were not very optimistic. Learners were viewed as lacking in aspirations because according to the principal and teachers, learners were lazy, not committed, not caring about their futures and because of the lack of parental involvement. There was not much reference to what the school can do to motivate and support learners with their future goals. A teacher explains why there exist differences in educational aspirations between last year's matric learners compared to this year by describing how the school provided transport to university open days. There was only one teacher who made reference to what teachers can do, instead of seeing the learner as the problem. The teacher included motivation, a positive and humanistic attitude towards learners as a solution to motivate learners.

5.3 Learners views on education

After exploring the views of the principals and teachers at the schools on what they thought the educational futures of the learners were, I was then interested in hearing what the learners thought about education as a way to reach their future goals.

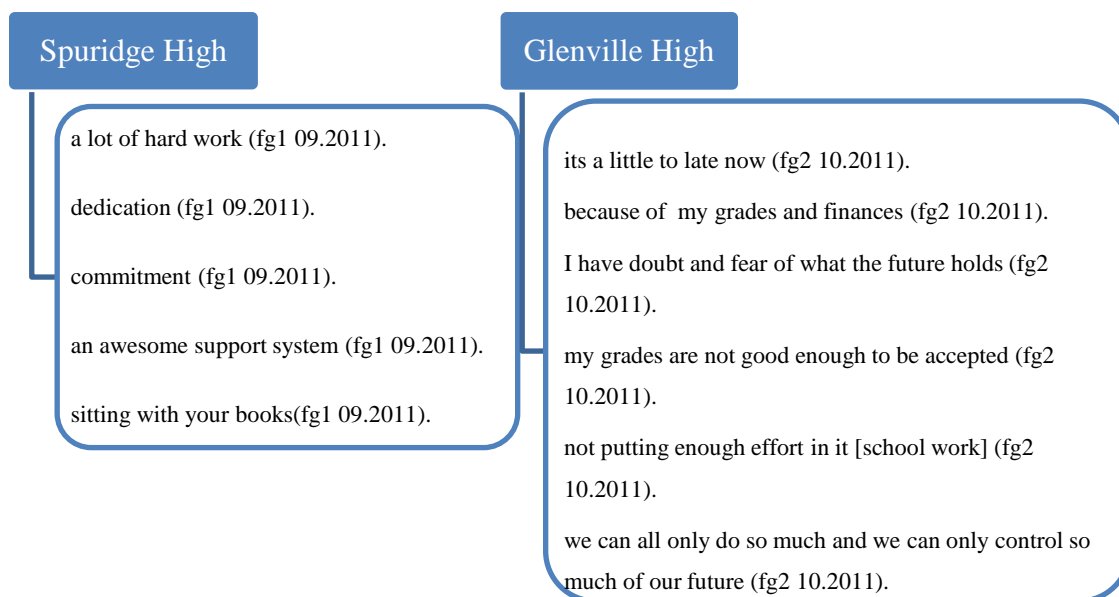


The participants at Glenville high acknowledged the importance of education. However, during the discussion references to “success stories” became a common theme. Participants pointed out that there were many people that they knew who did not have any formal education but still managed to be successful in life. According to the participants, personal characteristics and social networks played a greater role than education or having a degree.

Similararily, the participants at Spuridge high also acknowledged the importance of education, but they gave greater importance to the knowledge and benefits one can obtain through education. Education was seen as a way to a better future, a better job, financial

security and more opportunities. They also made reference to other people, but as examples of what happens when you do not have a degree or higher education. The benefit of having a degree was seen as a way to securing a job and being more competitive in the job market.

After discussing the meaning and benefits of education, I became interested in knowing what the participants thought it would take for them to reach their goals.



The participants at Spuridge high showed a clear understanding that it would take hard work and dedication to achieve their goals. Their responses were much alike what the school was aiming to instill in their learners. The participants at Glenville high on the other hand showed a certain degree of uncertainty and lack of control about their futures. Financial issues were also seen as one of the reasons for not being certain about the future. However, they acknowledged that because of not putting enough hard work and effort into their school work, their grades were not good enough to get accepted into university.

6 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the main findings that were presented in the previous chapter based on the literature review, contextual background and the theoretical framework presented in chapter one, two and three, while attempting to answer the research questions of this study. The structure of the discussion will firstly consist of the findings relating to the neighborhood environment followed by the findings relating to the school environment. The purpose of the present study was to determine which possible factors within the school environment might influence educational aspirations and secondly, whether or not the neighborhood environment of the participants and their schools had any influence on their educational aspirations. Two research questions were addressed:

- 1) How does the school environment influence educational aspirations of coloured female learners?
- 2) How does living in one of the Cape Flats disadvantaged neighborhoods, Mitchell's Plain, influence educational aspirations of coloured female learners?

Lastly, I will give a summary and some concluding remarks about the main findings of this study. This will be presented in the form of a model which will illustrate the outcome of this study in relation to theoretical assumptions and literature.

6.2 The importance of Place

From the literature review and the theory of neighborhood organization and culture by Elliott et al. (2006), one can draw certain conclusions about the social contexts of the participants in this study. I have previously explained the importance of not overseeing the *place* from which the participants come from and in which their schools are situated in. The findings of previous research studies suggest that disadvantaged neighborhoods have a negative effect on the educational aspirations of youth living there. Also, that youth from disadvantaged high crime neighborhoods have low levels of educational aspirations and low future expectations. The importance of place is relevant because as Raffo (2011:9) explains, "the stressors [in

neighborhoods] increase the wear and tear on the body and mind hence ones freedom to aspire to, and achieve, valued educational identities.”

One can agree that disadvantaged, deprived or high crime neighborhoods might exert a certain degree of influence on the aspirations of youth but this does not necessarily mean that because youth come from certain neighborhoods that they have low aspirations or future expectations. Raffo (2011: 9) states that it is important to ensure that “places, families and young people are not stigmatized by poverty but instead are provided with the assets and resources to help engage in civic aspects of life, including education, with dignity and pride.”

The data relating to the neighborhood environment did not appear to have much influence on the educational aspirations of the participants. However, references to “success stories” or people participants knew in their neighborhood appeared to have some influence on their aspirations. Strangely enough and regardless of the nature of the neighborhood of the schools and the participants, the sense of safety was upheld through the social networks within their neighborhood. The data from Spuridge high showed that although schools are situated in challenging environments, the institutional culture of the school can influence the agency of learners.

What one can conclude from the findings relating to the neighborhood environment is that the participants in this study were not exposed to various social networks *outside* their neighborhood. Although, the social ties and networks within their neighborhood gave the participants a sense of safety, exposure to varied social environments were not evident. Cuthbert and Hatch (1996: 4) explain that “young people often lacked the advantage of a diverse network of contacts outside their immediate neighborhoods and social circles. For those interested in supporting the formation of high expectations, this matters, because young people’s social networks influence their expectations.” Hence, youth from disadvantaged, deprived or high crime neighborhoods do have aspirations and future expectations for themselves despite the characteristics of their neighborhood they come from.

6.3 The future social positions of learners

The school is viewed as a central social institution through which opportunities for success are made available. However, there appears to be a certain perception of schools and youth in disadvantaged or ghetto neighborhoods. According to the theory of neighborhood

organization and culture, the school environment is influenced by the socio-economic characteristics of the neighborhood it is situated in and from the socio-economic backgrounds of the learners attending the school (Elliott et al. 2006). The extract below highlights certain youth development and outcomes of students in schools located in disadvantaged neighborhoods:

students in ghetto schools are not encouraged to develop the levels of self-esteem or the styles of presentation which employers perceive as evidence of capacity or ability. Secondly, schools opt patterns of socialization which reflect the background and/or future social positions of their students. Those schools with high concentration of poor and minorities have radically different internal environments, methods of teaching and attitudes toward students than predominantly white, upper middle class suburban schools (Elliott et al. 2006:103).

From the above extract, it is assumed that students are socialized and trained to feel and perform certain low wage jobs (Elliott 2006:103). Furthermore, those students are not encouraged or motivated to achieve certain jobs. Also those schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods often do not inform students and their parents about the opportunities available and procedures relating to further education. Therefore, Elliott et al. (2006) conclude that the educational expectations for students in disadvantaged neighborhood schools is the perception of limited or no opportunity for further education, hence low educational aspirations.

Based on the data from this study, there are dissimilarities between the two schools in the way they view the future positions of their learners. At Glenville high, the attitudes and views of the teachers and principal indicated that it was less likely that the participants would move onto higher education. In addition, participants did not receive motivation or encouragement from the school environment. Also, participants were not well equipped with relevant information about higher education. Participants at Spuridge high on the other hand, received relevant information and the teachers and principal had high expectations for the futures of the learners. Therefore, the institutional culture or school culture might limit the agency of learners thereby influencing their educational identities or educational aspirations.

In educational contexts, questions of identity are especially critical because the development of educational practice and policies are grounded in different ways of understanding who learners are or should be. How students interpret and develop their identities in a given context is shaped by self-perceptions, desires, hopes and expectations as well as salient aspects of social context, such as sociopolitical ideologies, histories and structures that are often beyond the control of an individual (Lee and Anderson 2009:181).

According to Lee and Anderson (2009), the educational identities of students, the way they perceive themselves, their hopes and expectations are all shaped in a social context such as the school environments in this study. This was evident in the agency displayed by the students in Spuridge as compared to those from Glenville. The authors also state that it is through educational practice and policies in which the future identities of learners are developed. When looking at the data on the theme of principal and teachers views on learners' aspirations, one can notice the differences between the responses from each school. Data from Spuridge high shows that the principals and teachers had more high hopes and belief in the futures of their learners and the data reflects a certain standard of expected behaviours from the learners. Commitment, hard work and motivation were common themes as a way towards success and reaching ones goals. While data from the principal and teachers at Glenville high showed a different image about the futures of the learners. Learners were mostly viewed as being lazy and not caring about their futures. Lupton and Kintrea (2008) state that self-efficacy is a central component in the development of high aspirations of young people. With self-efficacy when young people believe that they can achieve their goals through hard work, they will then feel confident that they have a reasonable chance of reaching their goals. The principal and teachers at Spuridge high tried to instill a sense of self-efficacy within their learners by motivating their learners. Compared to Glenville high, self-efficacy did not appear to be what the school tried to instill in their learners. This is indicated by the principal and teachers' attitude and perception of the future positions of the learners. According to Raffo (2011:9):

it is precisely the nature of this identity and agency that many schools have difficulty in understanding, often accrediting choices and behaviours of young people within schools to forms of cultural deprivation experienced in communities rather than seeing these choices and behaviours as a complex set of often rationally chosen actions based on culturally and economically situated contexts.

According to Lupton and Kintrea (2008), the problem of aspirations may not be what people want, but rather what they are constrained or allowed to achieve. Wilson and Wilson (1992) also state that when adolescents perceived support from their teachers, they were more likely to have high aspirations and to pursue them. Furthermore, Quaglia and Cobb (1996) state that the goals set by learners and the aim of accomplishing those goals are open for intervention. This suggests that educators may be in a position to positively impact students desire to achieve (Quaglia & Cobb 1996). Thus, when youth are encouraged and motivated by the

school, it is more probable that they will have high aspirations like the learners from Spuridge high, but more importantly, that they believe they will be able to achieve them.

6.4 Capabilities through Information

The literature presented in chapter 1 on the topic of national and international policies relating to the educational aspirations of youth states that governments have the responsibility to a) aid in the formation of youth aspirations, and b) to make educational and vocational information available, and c) to offer guidance for youth to reach their goals. Wilson and Wilson (1992: 67) state that “the school is the institution through which educational goals are crystallized and often realized.” Schools are also viewed as a central social institution through which opportunities for success are made available (Elliott et al. 2006).

Schools located in or serving disadvantaged neighborhoods are assumed to offer poor quality education and lack material and human resources (Elliott et al. 2006, Lupton & Kintrea 2008). Also those schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods often do not inform students and their parents about the opportunities available and procedures relating to further education. Therefore, Elliott et al. (2006) assume that the educational expectations for students in disadvantaged neighborhood schools is the perception of limited or no opportunity for further education, hence low educational aspirations. The outcome may be far more strongly influenced by structures of opportunity than by aspiration or motivation.

For this study I have chosen to focus on the LO subject as a mean to guide me and allow me to investigate the kind of educational and vocational information learners were expected to be equipped with. Raffo (2011) explains the importance of the connection between the curriculum and the neighborhood environment of learners, and how the lack of such a connection may restrict learners from entrance into higher education with the extract below:

First, the curriculum too often makes no connection with their learning in their community contexts and the educational capabilities they may have come to value, so that there is no intrinsic value to engage them in the educational experience. Second, as a result of this lack of connection, students may often miss out on the codified knowledge of the curriculum that gives access to further education, training and employment. In addition Hacker (1998) points to many discriminating processes in schools that can disadvantage poor urban students further, particularly in the way students are provided no choice but are directed to particular curriculum options (Raffo 2011:11).

The data from this study relating to the kind of knowledge and skills learners were expected to be equipped with as indicated in the learning outcomes for LO (see Table 5.3 Learning outcomes for grade 12), appeared to be lacking at Glenville high. This might indicate the lack of connection between the participants' educational experience and the curriculum as stated by Raffo (2011). The lack of connection between the neighborhood realities (high unemployment levels and high crime rates) of the participants and the LO curriculum might account for the participants lack of knowledge relating to higher education. However, the participants at Spuridge high appeared to be well equipped with relevant information about higher education compared to those at Glenville high. This might be explained by the teachers and principal being able to make a stronger connection between the neighborhood realities of the learners and the LO curriculum thereby allowing learners more possibilities for higher education.

According to Lupton and Kintrea (2008), young people and their parents need appropriate and reliable advice and information to help them to make informed choices. When young people are equipped with the right information relating to further education and training, young people will then make knowledgeable choices in order to reach their goals. The school is one of the central information institutions for young people and their parents. However, Elliott et al. (2006) and the Cabinet Office (2008) suggests that schools located in and serving disadvantaged neighborhoods do not inform students or their parents about relevant information pertaining to further education. Furthermore, Raffo (2011:13) states that in order for youth to make informed decisions "schools, colleges and other educational institutions need to understand the educational identities of young people and to support their agency to make informed choices and have control over their educational lives." The data revealed that the participants at Spuridge high received motivation and encouragement from their teachers and principal, and this aided in supporting their agency. Also, the participant data from Spuridge high indicated that they were more knowledgeable about processes and information relating to higher education which allowed them to have a greater sense of control over their educational futures. The data from Glenville high indicated that participants felt that they had less control over their educational futures, they illustrated less agency and were less informed about higher education. Therefore, motivation, encouragement, support and information may influence the educational identities and agency of learners.

As described earlier, there are certain perceptions of the school environments of schools located in disadvantaged neighborhoods. According to the theory of neighborhood organization and culture which assumes that institutional effectiveness is weak in schools located in and serving disadvantaged neighborhoods due to the limited resources and material it operates on. With a weak institutional presence, opportunities for legitimate work, advanced education and training is greatly restricted. Information about opportunities and how to access them are limited (Elliott et al. 2006).

Based on the findings from this study, the schools in this study do function on a low-per pupil budget, the physical environments are deprived and resources are limited. However, this does not necessarily mean that all schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods have low quality standards and lack relevant information about opportunities for further education. The schools in this study are situated in the same geographical area and neighborhood but when comparing the data on what kind of information the participants received at each school, differences appeared. Contrary to the assumption made by Elliott et al. (2006:109) about neither students nor their parents in disadvantaged neighborhood schools not being informed about financial aid and university entrance requirements, Spuridge high participants seemed to be well equipped with relevant information as stated in the LO curriculum. Participants at Spuridge high also appeared to be more informed and knowledgeable about financial opportunities available to them, university requirements and procedures for reaching their goals compared to the participants at Glenville high. Also, the participant data revealed a higher sense of agency amongst the learners from Spuridge high than those from Glenville high as previously mentioned. Thus, learners may need relevant information about opportunities available to them in order to make career choices and to reach their goals.

Furthermore, it is assumed that youth in schools located in disadvantaged neighborhoods have little or no contact with adults outside their immediate neighborhood (Elliott et al. 2006). According to the theory of neighborhood and culture, the lack of contact with adults working in schools and adults from outside the neighborhood is seen as having a negative influence on youth development and outcome. This is because these adults acts as role models and provide youth with information about opportunities for further education and work opportunities. Additionally, Wilson's theory on neighborhood effects on educational aspirations assumes that youth living in disadvantaged neighborhoods are less exposed to different mainstream environments and have therefore fewer opportunities for contact with employed and

financially secured adults. Moreover, certain views of the few benefits of achieving success in school may be established because of youth not being exposed to mainstream environments or adults (Stewart et al 2007). Donahoe and Tienda (1992:2 cited in Cosser et al. 2004:4) further explain certain outcomes of youth who lack appropriate schooling and skills:

For a variety of reasons, many youth leave school ill-prepared for employment in a labour market that increasingly rewards and demands technical as well as cognitive skills. Due to a lack of institutional or personal ties to jobs or training programs and skill deficits accumulated over years of substandard and or/inappropriate schooling, non-college bound youth experience high unemployment and an extended period of “thrashing” or “milling about.”

Based on the data from this study, participants at both schools were exposed to information and adults from tertiary institutions. The schools invited representatives from various tertiary institutions. However, Glenville high invited representatives once or twice a year whereas Spuridge high invited representatives three times a year, in addition to motivational speakers and guest professors. Due to the participants at Spuridge high being more often exposed to adults from tertiary environments, participants were more inclined to see what can be accomplished with additional schooling compared to the participants from Glenville high. Thus students may need to experience increased exposure to higher education and be informed about opportunities available to them in order to make informed decisions.

6.5 The benefits of higher education

South Africa’s National Youth Policy (NYP) 2009-2014 (The Presidency 2008) highlights the importance of raising youth aspirations and links the outcome thereof with that of youth social mobility. The social and economic development of youth is viewed as key a factor for the countries human and economic development.

In this study, both groups of participants expressed their goals for the future. However, when examining the data on what the participants thought about the benefit or value of education, variation in responses appeared. While both groups of participants acknowledged the importance of education, variations of the benefits of education existed between the groups of participants. Participants at Spuridge high expressed educational success as a way to financial stability, status attainment and to knowledge attainment. In addition, participants added that by having a degree is a way of securing a good job and a secure future. Higher education was seen as a way of providing better job opportunities and being a more favorable candidate in

the job market. According to Kao and Tienda (1998), youth who do not expect schooling to pay off in the long run and youth who do not anticipate educational success to equate to economic success, usually have low educational aspirations. Participants at Spuridge high made a linkage between educational and economic success contrary to the participants at Glenville high. Wilson and Wilson (1992) state that because youth are unsure of the benefits of educational success as a process to reach upward mobility, they will usually draw back on the level of educational aspirations. In addition, they state that a certain culture of uncertainty is created resulting in student's educational underperformance and devaluation of education.

The data from Glenville high indicated a certain kind of devaluation of education because participants could not see the linkage between social and economic success compared to the participants at Spuridge high. Some participants at Glenville high made references to success stories, people they knew who have become successful without higher education. The benefits or the importance of attaining a higher education degree was not seen as a way for upward mobility by the participants at Glenville high. Hence, youth may need to see the benefits that come along with additional schooling and higher education thereby allowing them to develop aspirations in terms of further education and to pursue their goals. Individuals need to be able to evaluate, understand and recognize that what they are doing in the present is relevant for their futures (Quaglia & Cobb 1996).

As to summarize and conclude this thesis, I will draw together the main findings of this study. Starting off with my preliminary analytical device (figure 4.1), and the Model of Neighborhood and School Influences on Educational Aspirations (figure 3.1) derived and modified from the theory by Elliott et al (2006) of neighborhood organization and culture, I will present the outcome of this research study in a model that will illustrate the possible influences on the educational aspirations of grade 12, coloured learners in two schools in Mitchell's Plain.

7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Coming from a certain neighborhood, a certain culture or racial group does not mean that your future is predictable. Although our environments do exert some kind of influence on us, our environments cannot define us. It cannot define our future educational identities. It is through dreams and aspirations that we allow ourselves to push away from certain anticipated social positions in society. The participants in this study come from a high-crime environment and they are exposed to illegal activities. Their schools do function on a low per-pupil budget in a challenging environment. However, all the participants in this study expressed their aspirations for their future.

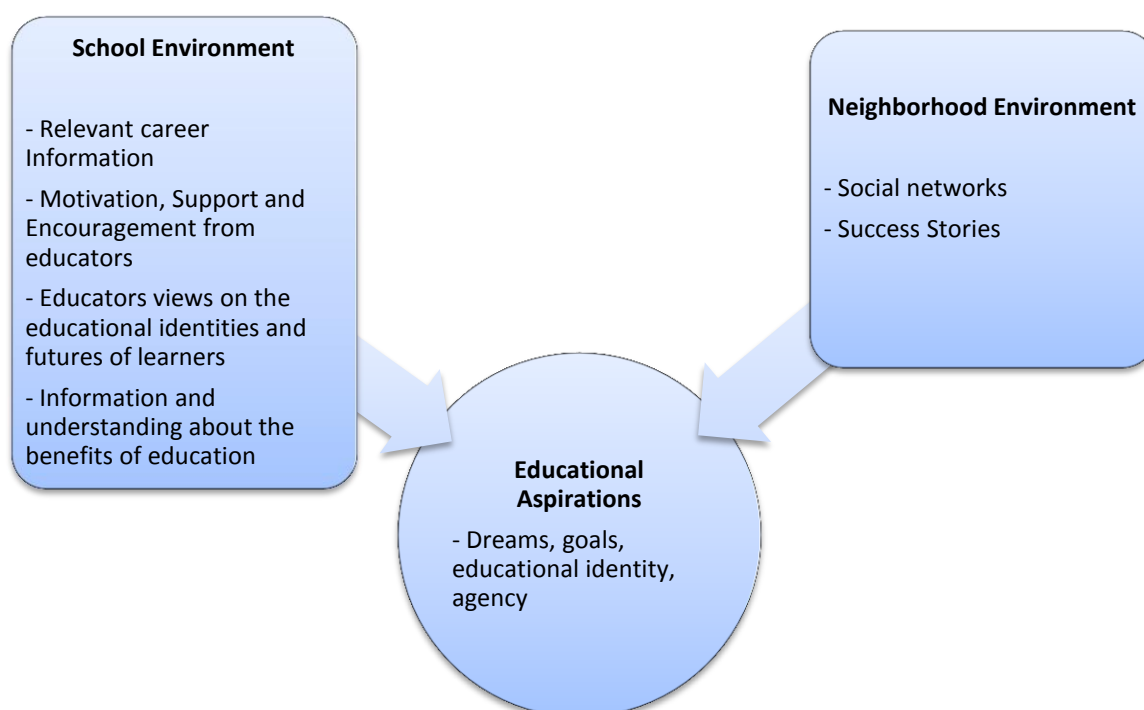


Figure 7.1: Possible influences on Educational Aspirations

The findings from this research study with a focus on the educational aspirations of coloured female learners in two Cape Flat schools has shown various influences on the educational aspirations of the participants in this study. The findings within the school environment included:

- Relevant career Information
- Motivation, Support and Encouragement from educators
- Educators views on the educational identities and futures of learners
- Information and understanding about the benefits of education

These factors showed that when learners received relevant information about opportunities available to them and when learners experience increased exposure to higher education, they were more inclined to make informed career decisions. Motivation, support and encouragement from educators made it more likely that learners would have high aspirations. Also, with the support from educators, learners felt that they were more in control of their educational futures and believed that they would achieve their goals. Educators' views on the future positions and educational identities of learners, gave them a sense of self-efficacy and agency to pursue their goals. In addition, when learners are informed and understand the benefits of additional schooling, there is a greater chance that they will not only have high aspirations, but also pursue their goals.

Although, research studies and theory have concluded that the educational futures, future expectations, ambitions and aspirations are low for youth and schools located in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Elliot et al. 2006) this study shows a somewhat different picture. Thus, youth from disadvantaged, deprived or high crime neighborhoods do have aspirations and future expectations for themselves despite the characteristics of the neighborhood they come from, as illustrated in this study. The neighborhood environment in this study did not appear to have much influence on the educational aspirations of the participants. However, references to "success stories" or people participants knew in their neighborhood appeared to have some influence on their aspirations. Strangely enough and regardless of the nature of the neighborhood of the schools and the participants, the sense of safety was upheld through the social networks within their neighborhood. The schools in this study showed that although schools are situated in challenging environments, the institutional culture of the schools can influence the agency of learners.

My aim for this research study is not to generalize to the broader society. The findings from this study, however, do give an account of aspirations and agency and shares the ideas, thoughts and dreams of the participants in *this* study. My intention is not to give advice on policy or curriculum recommendations. Instead it was to shed light on the educational aspirations and the realities faced by coloured female learners in a disadvantaged/low-poverty

neighborhood. Conversely, in order to see the actual differences in the outcome of the two different school cultures it would be beneficial to follow the educational paths of the participants in this study in order to see just how far they have come on their journey to achieving their educational aspirations.

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Attachments

Informed Consent Form

Title of the Study: Educational aspirations amongst teen girls in South African schools.

Request for voluntary participation in a Masters Degree research project.

Principal investigator: Dawn Heskestad

Institute: Faculty of Educational Science and Research, University of Oslo, Norway

School Name:

My name is Dawn Heskestad and I am a master student at the University of Oslo. I would like to talk to you about educational aspirations or what kind of goals you have when you finish high school. I would also like to talk a little about your family background, what you think about schooling, what plans you have for your future? The purpose of my study is to analyze which factors might influence or affect educational goals amongst teen girls.

The interview/group discussion is voluntary and will not affect your relationship to school if you choose not to participate. The interview/group discussion should take approximately one hour. I will be taping the session, if you agree, because I don't want to miss any of your comments. All your responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview/group discussion responses will only be for my use and I will ensure that any information I include in my report does not identify you as the respondent. All audio recordings and personal information will be deleted when my project is completed.

Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview/group discussion at any time. Are there any questions about what I have just explained?

Are you willing to participate in this interview/group discussion?

Are you willing to allow the interview/group discussion to be recorded?

Interviewee/participant signature

Date

Legal guardian (if interviewee/participant is under 18)

Contact Details: Dawn Heskestad 004798471757 or 0027796497645

Supervisor: Dr. Halla B. Holmarsdottir 004722452169

Research Instrument

Focus group discussions

School:	Date:	Gender:
Number of respondents:	Grade:	

Section A: About you

1. What is your age?
2. Which area do you come from?

Section B: About your parents/guardians?

☐

3. Who do you live with?
4. How far did your mother go in school?
5. How far did your father go in school?
6. How many adults work in your home?

☐

Section C: your plans for after high school

1. What does education mean to you?
2. Is education important to you?
3. Do you intend to finish High school?
4. What is your educational aspirations? What do you want to do after high school? What do you want to become oneday?

5. If your plans **are** to go to college/university, how will you pay for your studies?
6. If your plans are **not** to go to college/university, how do you intend to support yourself?

Section D: School Environment

7. Do you receive information from your school about higher education?
8. What kind of information do you receive from your school?
9. Who provides you with this information?

Section E: Neighborhood Environment

10. How would you describe your neighborhood?
11. Do you like living in your neighborhood?
12. Do you feel safe living here?
13. Do you think you are influenced by living here?

Research Instrument

Focus group discussion: Follow up Questionnaire

School:	Date:
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1. Have your thoughts or plans about your future educational goals changed since our last meeting?
2. Have you given more thought to how you will reach your future educational goals since our last meeting?
 - If yes, what have you given more thought to?
3. Have you spoken to your parents/guardians about your future goals since our last meeting?
 - If yes, what have you discussed with them?
4. Have you done further or acquired any further information about how to reach your goals after our last meeting?
 - If yes, what have you investigated?
5. Have you spoken to any of your teachers about your future goals since our last meeting?
 - If yes, what have you spoken to him/her about?
6. Up to this point in your life, what do you think has been the most influential factor on your future educational goals?

Tick one or more of the following factors below:

- Information you received/available at school
- Through support and motivation from your school/teachers

- Through support and motivation from your family/parents/guardians
- Through the availability and need of jobs in a specific field
- Other:

Thank you for your participation!